A Writer of Fiction

by

Chris Holland

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A WRITER OF FICTION

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A Writer of Fiction

BY

CLIVE HOLLAND

AUTHOR OF

'MY JAPANESE WIFE,' ETC.

Westminster

ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE AND CO.

1897

Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, Printers to Her Majesty

TO

SEPTIMUS P. MOORE

LL.B., B.Sc.

IN MEMORY OF MANY PLEASANT DAYS

CHAPTER I

JOHN MARCH CARDEW had married light-heartedly enough at six-and-twenty ; and now, sixteen years afterwards, he lay awake in a lodging-house tortured by the reflection that it had all been a terrible mistake—for the woman he had married.

In the watches of the night—alas ! now of almost every night—when he did not sleep the heavy, unrestful sleep that comes of brain exhaustion, he lay and thought over the beautiful chimæras which had flitted through his brain during the years of early success. And thus the strident morning noises of the mean semi-suburban street found him, and kept him so even when his eyelids, leaden

from want of rest, would have dropped over his smarting eyes.

The shrill cry of the early coster, which would have distracted him later in the day, now only caused him vaguely to attempt to discover what the lusty-lunged vendor was selling. Then he heard the familiar sound of the man in the room above getting out of bed, and whistling as he douched himself nonchalantly in the cold water preparatorily to jumping into his clothes so as to catch his train, and begin another day of humdrum, it respectable, existence.

All this time, and whilst other dwellers in the house were getting up with the indifference to other people's comfort which seems inbred with the genus 'lodger,' the woman slept.

Through the flimsy blinds of glazed calico, once a straw yellow sprayed with pink rosebuds and vivid green leaves, now a neutral blend of these three colours, the light filtered

strongly enough for Cardew to see the face of his wife at his side. It was a really beautiful one—one of those faces which dead hopes and lost ambitions seem unable to spoil, and only succeed in chastening. The lips were parted slightly, as if the sleeper were about to speak; and the brown hair, so thick and long, lay a dark mass on the pillow, and strayed in truant curls over the smooth white brow. A faint colour suffused the upturned cheek, and a smile, or the emotion of a pleasant dream, stole across the mouth. Cecily Cardew passed amongst Cardew's literary friends as a 'fine woman'—quite 'statuesque,' Sefton-Bell called her—but the lodging-house landlady was nearer the mark when she spoke of her as 'noble.' Cardew himself knew that in her he possessed a wife among ten thousand, and his disposition made this at one and the same time a joy and a torment.

Working late, he had robbed the night of

several hours, and now he lay watching her, with his restless, over-active brain thinking and thinking of the uselessness of it all. Even when, to give expression to his irresistible longing to do something for her sake, to place comfort and freedom from anxiety once more within her grasp, he kissed her lightly on the brow, she did not stir.

The clock at the head of the stairs just outside the room door gave a premonitory whirr and rattle ere striking six on its tuneless wire 'gong.' The noise disturbed the woman, who, turning over with a sleepy smile and pulling her husband's face nearer hers, asked—

'What time was that that struck, John?' Before they had come to 26 Ophelia Road, Kentish Town, she always called him 'March,' but with intuition she had recognised 'John' was good enough for meanly furnished lodgings in such a street.

'Six, dear. I think I had better get up soon. Isn't that Sylvia stirring?'

'I should rest a while. You must be tired; you came in very late. I wish it weren't necessary for you to work so hard.' And then she listened.

Through the embarrassingly thin wall, which separated the room adjoining scarcely in anything save sight, came the sounds of the occupant arising. Indeed, houses in Ophelia Road could possess few secrets. First the sound of a child's bare feet, then muffled sounds, then the sharp gurgling swish of poured-out water, the noise of the soap being dropped carelessly back in a cracked dish, and a girl's voice humming the air of a popular tune. This ceased in the middle of a bar, as if the singer had become suddenly conscious that she might disturb some one. Then the bedstead was evidently pushed back against the partition wall. Some one was speaking, and Cardew knew from the

monotone what was taking place. He listened, but could at first only catch a word here and there. After a minute or so, however, the tone became more earnest, and he heard distinctly the ensuing sentences right on till the voice ceased :—

'Please make father's book a success, so that mother may be less troubled, and we may go back to "The Lilacs," or some other nice place away from all this noise and dirt, and the rude boys and girls,' Cardew heard, and then he edged away from the wall so as to hear no more, without turning his face towards his wife.

'Even Sylvia feels the noise and squalor. What about Cecily? God help me, and her, my Cecily!'

'Is there anything the matter, dear?'

'No, nothing. I must get up. There's that chapter,' Cardew replied, in as steady a voice as he could assume.

'Always that chapter,' exclaimed the

woman, in a voice which for the moment had almost a ring of gaiety in it. 'What a book it will be! You won't be going to the city to-day, dear?'

'No;—but I don't know, after all. I shall see what turns up,' was the answer, as he commenced to dress, thankful at heart that the rickety dressing-table was so placed that he could do so without turning his face towards the bed, where the woman was now putting up her wealth of brown hair.

As soon as he had hurried on his coat, he went hastily downstairs. He could not bear to see his wife putting on garments which were such silent, compromising witnesses of better days. The shabby dress, which showed only wear, and not dust nor dirt, always neat, and telling of better times by its accurate fit and style; and the other garments mended and mended again, so that the children might be kept above the level of their surroundings, and retain self-respect

thereby,—all were, at times, too terrible for him to contemplate unmoved.

Cardew, before anxiety and failure had set their seal upon him, had been a handsome man. Of more than the average height, he was well built, with black hair, a good-featured face, and grey-blue eyes, keen and intellectual-looking.

The girl of fifteen, who was seated in the window of the one sitting-room the Cardews occupied, evidently learning her lessons, according to the landlady, 'took after both her father and mother.' At all events, no one would fail to mistake her as Cardew's daughter.

'Why, Sylvia, child, you are early! how long have you been down?' exclaimed her father, as she rose, and, crossing the room, put up her pretty face to his for a kiss, and said, 'Two, please, daddie.'

'Where's Ned?' asked the latter.

'In bed,' was the answer, laughingly fol-

lowed by, 'Why, that's rhyme, or poetry, or something, daddie! we'll have to—what you call it—Ah, that's it—collaborate.'

'The lazy young imp! Go and call him. Your mother will be down in a minute or two, and I want to get breakfast over quickly this morning, so that I can go to work.'

When the girl had left the room, Cardew crossed to the breakfast-table, and wearily took up the three or four letters which lay near his plate. A bulky packet bearing the label of a publishing house struck a chill to his heart.

He opened one letter, from his literary agents, in the faint hope that it might contain some 'good news.' It began:

'298 Paternoster Square, E.C.,
'London, *June* 3*rd*, 1892.

'Dear Mr. Cardew,—You will believe me that it is with the most sincere

reluctance that we venture to suggest that at least for the present you abstain from sending us any MSS., either of novels or short stories.

'You will remember that we have already in our possession several, which we have unfortunately failed to place. No doubt your market will improve, and in doing so permit us to dispose of your work as easily as of yore.

'But, just now, the demand seems chiefly for the work of the newer school of writers, and we are compelled to supply existing fashions in literature to the best of our ability.

'However, we shall use our earnest endeavours, as heretofore, to place the MSS. with which you have been good enough to favour us.

'Again, we could not conscientiously accept fees for work we, at present, see no reasonable hope of performing.

'Trusting that you and Mrs. Cardew are well, believe us to be, yours faithfully,

'GRAHAM AND SENIOR.

'To J. MARCH CARDEW, Esq.,
'26 Ophelia Road,
'Kentish Town, N.W.'

Cardew re-read the letter with a blanching face. There could be little room for doubt of its meaning. It was plain enough. All the carefully formed phrases—kindly meant, no doubt—were but so many admissions that his work was unsaleable. Graham and Senior's failure to place his last two books had caused him many an anxious hour and sleepless night, and now literary extinction was threatened. The agents were no men of straw; to have a work submitted by them had come to be regarded by both publishers and authors alike as some sort of guarantee of its worth and the ability of its writer. And now they could not even undertake their office for him. He glanced at the small

bookcase of stained and varnished deal in the corner of the room, which contained in some twenty of its volumes the evidence of his life's work. Was he now never to add another? Was everything he had lived and worked for to be at an end? The other letters remained for the moment unthought of and unread.

When the door opened, Cardew pulled himself together with an effort; but the traces of the 'bad news,' which, as the children said, was now always coming at breakfast-time, could not be thus lightly effaced.

Seating himself at the breakfast-table, he commenced to cut the bread.

'Aren't you well, daddie?' exclaimed Sylvia, who had come to his side, and rested her pretty, golden-crowned head against his shoulder.

'Yes, dear—I 'm all right. It is nothing. Pour me out some coffee—there 's a good

child. And then get your breakfast, or you 'll lose your train and be late for school.'

Adversity is a hard school, but it sharpens the wits and perceptive faculties of its scholars.

'Not those horrid publishers again, daddie?' questioned the girl, as she poured out the coffee, which smelt so differently from that they used to have at 'The Lilacs.'

'I wish they wouldn't bother so, or that you could do without them. Why must authors be under—under obligations to publishers?' Sylvia glanced up, as there was no answer forthcoming, and the look of pain on her father's face checked any further speculations concerning this subject.

'Never mind, daddie,' she resumed, taking his coffee round the oval-shaped table, which, like them, had seen better days, and was now so rickety that it had to be periodically 'levelled up,' so to speak, with pieces of paper or old envelopes. 'Your stories are the loveliest in the world. But why are they so sad?

I don't understand all of them, and mother says I shan't till I grow up; but I like them, all the same.'

Whilst the child was speaking, Cecily Cardew entered. 'Why are they so sad?' She had caught the words. She knew, but the children must be made as happy as circumstances would permit.

'Where's Ned, dear? Has he gone?'

'Gone!' laughed the girl. 'Yes, I expect so. Gone to sleep again. Why are boys such terribly sleepy creatures, I wonder? He'll never get off to school. But here he comes at last.'

The boy of thirteen who entered was extremely handsome. His features were regular as a girl's, but had a certain strength which saved his face from any approach to insipidity. He was tall for his age, and already was 'the very miniature image of his father,' according to Mrs. Morriston, the landlady, with whom he was a great favourite.

Blue eyes and curly brown hair—at present several shades lighter than his mother's—gave him, with a boyish carelessness, a certain happiness of expression, which even dingily furnished lodgings and a brooding sense of calamity that of late had hovered over the Cardew household had not succeeded in eliminating.

'Overslept myself, father. I'm awfully sorry; but Sylvia knows what a fellow I am, and she might knock louder.'

'Oh, I like that!' said the girl, who was glancing at the big-faced, nickel-plated clock on the mantelshelf. 'I banged till I thought I should have burst the door in. Anyway, you answered, and the young man who's in the room opposite said you must sleep like Momus—Morpheus I suppose he meant, but that doesn't matter, it was near enough for him' (with fine contempt); 'I heard you turn over and go to sleep again.'

The boy took his seat at the table, and

without another word commenced to eat his breakfast in hot haste.

'What could a fellow do with a girl who bantered and cornered him like that?' was the thought which occupied his mind. He took it all in good part, however: the two were excellent chums; and whenever Ned felt worsted in this way, boy-like, he sought to console himself with the reflection that there were a good many things Sylvia couldn't do which he could. Ergo, he was a superior sort of being to his pretty, keen-witted sister, after all.

Cecily Cardew was a wise woman; she never spoke of nor referred to disagreeable subjects at breakfast or late at night, nor, indeed, before the children at all. 'They must be kept happy and free from care as long as possible.' Such was her opinion and her constant endeavour.

When she entered the room, the look upon the face of the man she loved told her

something unfortunate had again occurred; but she only gave him a quick glance of sympathy, another glance at the bulky brown-paper parcel on the table, and then waited for explanations till the children had gone to school.

Ten minutes later, and Cardew and she were alone. She with her mind already engaged in seeking to devise new schemes of economy to meet the disaster which it, accustomed to such things, presaged. He with his tormented by the additional burden which would be laid upon her frail woman's shoulders, and the terrible sense of failure which weighed upon his heart,—the waning of his powers, which every day seemed to make more certain, robbing him of every shred of happiness and self-respect.

CHAPTER II

'JOHN, what is the matter?' said the woman, coming over to him as the street door banged after the children, and the brass knocker lifted and fell to echo the bang.

John Cardew looked into the face which was close to his, and tried to smile away the concern he saw upon it.

'I have had this letter,' he replied after a pause, the silence of which was broken by the noises of the street, and the undignified, hasty ticking of the cheap American clock on the mantelpiece. 'You had better read it. I'm afraid, Cecily, it means a good deal to me, and through me to us all.' And then, as his wife took it from him with trembling

fingers, he turned silently away to the window.

For once the squalor of the street failed to impress itself on his mind; the dirty children were mere misty objects, almost transfigured by the brilliant June sunshine; the hansom cab which, penetrating this region as a short cut to one of the railway termini, excited the curiosity—so rarely was one seen—of every one in the road, aroused none in him. In his mind just then was nothing save the terrible last question of the Man of Galilee, to which no answer came to him.

The woman read the letter, and re-read it, as he had. Yes, it was a serious blow. Something must be done; could she suggest anything?

'John, dear, I'm so sorry. But we must not despair.'

'Yes,' said the man, turning away wearily from the window. 'You're a good woman, Cecily. But this finishes me—finishes all I

have to do. Do you remember when we were first married—what plans we made, you and I? I, who was to have done so much, have actually done so little. You have done your part. I—O God, I have failed—failed to do mine!'

John Cardew was speaking very rapidly; he was overwrought. His wife did not interrupt him; she only pointed silently to a row of books upon the shelves.

'Yes, yes, Cecily, I know; but the last. When did you place the last there? Two years ago?'

The woman loved him, so she said, 'Yes; but what of the one before that and ever so many more? They are live books, every one of them—books which many men who are successful would give much to have written, to be able to write. Come, dear, it is all very terrible, but the day will return when, as Graham and Senior say, "your market will improve." Is this all?'

'There are not many women, Cecily,' said John quite calmly, almost stung into cynicism by the latest experience of ill-fortune, 'who would look ruin in the face and then ask that. But no.'

Her glance followed his to the breakfast-table, on which still lay the brown-paper parcel.

'You have not opened it?'

'No. It is only *'Twixt Two Opinions* come back from Jellaby and Hodge's. There is their letter; what do they say? Read it, dear; somehow or other I cannot see.'

Both husband and wife knew perfectly well what the letter would contain.

The usual thing: 'Messrs Jellaby and Hodge beg to return by Parcels Post Mr. John March Cardew's MS. entitled *'Twixt Two Opinions*, of which they regret the report of their reader does not offer them sufficient encouragement to undertake its publication.

'*P.S.*—Messrs J. and H. wish it, however, to be distinctly understood'—oh, beautiful

sophistry!—'that they offer no opinion as to the merits or demerits of the MS. in question.'

'You must send it elsewhere, John. You have only tried three or four publishers; there are plenty more. Oh, I know it is painful to offer one's books the round like this,' she added after a pause, observing his face twitch at the suggestion. 'But we will conquer misfortune in the end.'

'I must go to work,' said Cardew as answer, with his hand at the door of the cupboard-like room, opening out of the sitting-room, which had been turned into and dignified with the title of 'study.'

'Very well, dear. What are you going to write?'

'Who knows?' and the door was suddenly shut.

There was so little for Cecily Cardew to do nowadays. One of her greatest trials was this fact. There were clothes to be

altered, patched, contrived, or mended; but what she most missed—what often brought the tears of recollection into her eyes—was the sweet control of the household she had lost when they migrated into lodgings. All those hundred little opportunities of doing something, which none save the housewife knows. The man on the other side of the study door never knew what the woman felt. Sometimes the meanly furnished room, with its staring wall-paper, which Mrs. Morriston had obtruded on her notice with such evident pride when they came to take the rooms, with the remark, 'There, mum, that's what I calls a nice, cheerful sort er paper,' seemed almost intolerable. And it was with a set face that she drove from her mind recollections of 'The Lilacs,' their home at Turnham Green, whilst the tears would fall.

She would be brave; yes, she would be brave—brave for his sake and that of the children.

They had not left Turnham Green without a struggle. Four years ago she was as fertile of resources as now, as clever in devising those pitiful *derniers ressorts* of humanity started on the down-grade as now. But they had availed nothing; bills accumulated, the discharge of the second servant was but a very temporary relief. And then the trouble commenced over again. The man missed the servant; but, absorbed in his work and the increasingly severe struggle for existence, scarcely realised that it was his wife who was principally doing the extra work.

It was always, 'Father must not be troubled,' to the children; to the remaining servant, 'Mr. Cardew must on no account be disturbed. It is most important that he should not have his thoughts interrupted.'

With strange irony of fate, John Cardew, before his marriage, had written a novel of literary life, in which the author's wife in it was thus described: 'She was a brave woman:

for months she interposed her heart between him and the sense of failure; and then, when to do so became no longer possible, she stood at bay guarding the life of the man she loved and believed in from a thousand and one petty cares and annoyances, and keeping the wolf of poverty from the door. A sublime figure of womanhood, on which the angels must have looked with pity and admiration.' The writer had forgotten the passage long ago; but some one in the household at 26 Ophelia Road often took the novel from its place on the shelf, and read the words over and over again. So often, indeed, that the volume now opened, as a matter of course, at the page desired.

The Cardews had not at once descended from the pretty little Queen Anne villa at Turnham Green to the dinginess of Mrs. Morriston's superior apartments.

There had been three stages of the fight against social and literary extinction, mark-

ing distinctly the growing infrequency and diminution in the value of the cheques received by the man who wrote books. From Turnham Green to a by-road off Clapham Common, where the house was still more bijou (as to size), and the outlook correspondingly less cheerful, then to part of a house in Kentish Town, and then to lodgings pure and simple in Ophelia Road —one of those mean-looking streets which huddle against the outskirts of more well-to-do quarters of the suburbs proper, with the houses all alike, as if their erection and design had been controlled by some stringent and inartistic Act of Uniformity for the Better Degradation of Architecture.

Whilst residing at Clapham the Cardews were not altogether cut off from literary society; John knew several editors and journalists who lived on Clapham Common, and occasionally they invited Cecily and him to their literary at-homes, or dropped

in—the more genial and less busy of them, that is—for a chat and a pipe. Their wives and daughters gauged the decline in the Cardew *ménage*, very accurately on the whole, by Cecily's dress, and some treated them accordingly. Their menkind, unpractised in such subtleties, did not pay much attention to Cardew's increasing air of shabby gentility, or, if they did, attributed it to artistic carelessness, or to the fact that he might be temporarily down on his luck.

A sale before the Cardews moved to Kentish Town was the first unmistakable sign they had of how matters were going. The man's brief explanation, 'It 'll be handier for work,' might have deceived them, workers themselves; but the sale, coupled with the damning fact that Mrs. Cardew hadn't had a new dress for months, was quite enough for the sex which possess such a faculty for 'putting two and two together.'

From Kentish Town they drifted to

Ophelia Road, a district of pepper-and-salt-coloured houses, chiefly let in apartments, which was only Kentish Town by the courtesy of the Postmaster-General, or the officials responsible for the apportionment of the metropolis into districts. Here editors did not call upon them, nor did cards for their wives' at-homes find them out even if they were posted. And the only journalist who ever came to No. 26 was Sefton Bell, a young fellow to whom John Cardew had, some years previously, lent a helping hand.

The noises of such a neighbourhood were at first a terrible torment to him. But as time went on he ceased to notice them so much as at first; but the want of light, of brightness, atmosphere, even of air, had a permanent effect upon him.

The close association with people whose ways were not his ways, with those who could not comprehend him,—the sense of isolation in the midst of hundreds of his

genus, yet not one of his species,—added its weight of depression.

Indeed, had it not been for Cicely, he would have knocked under long ago.

'Things will improve. Think of what you *have* accomplished,' prompted by her infinite faith, spurred him to fresh, if unfruitful, effort.

Everything must be sacrificed to him. Whatever heartaches she had, whatever vexations—and they were many—he must be spared. When they left Clapham, and he had seated himself sorrowfully to select what books he could spare to put in the sale, she had been the one to say, 'No, no, not the books, dear. We couldn't do without them. You mustn't think of selling those. *Besides*' —O subtle suggestion !—'they will be more valuable too, later on, for there are so many first editions.'

'Yes, very true,' was the at first hesitant reply.

And so they were not put in the sale.

From the study, littered with rough packing-cases, obtained from the hardware dealer in an adjacent road, in which Cardew was carefully stowing his literary treasures, she had gone to her own room, now stripped of its dainty—if cheap—hangings and ornaments, under the inexorable hands of the auctioneer's clerk engaged in cataloguing. From the dressing-table drawer, on the swinging glass of which the small strip of gummed paper, bearing in thick black figures the lot number, was already fixed, she took her jewel-case—a wedding present.

'Anything to save him anxiety. It is so important that his mind should be untroubled,' she thought, as she opened the case, with lips set firm to keep back the tears.

There were several things she did not want; this and that were quite useless; they would not be asked out much, so he would not miss that for months—perhaps not at all.

And so, while the little heap of ornaments and jewels in her lap grew larger and the tears more numerous, another of those women's tragedies was played out to the end, before no audience save the angels and the all-seeing eye of God.

And then, when their selection was complete, and the jewellery was neatly packed in a small cardboard box, she laved her eyes and face and went down to help her husband as if nothing unusual had occurred. And he noticed nothing.

Sefton Bell, in whose hands she had trusted the jewellery for disposal, handed her fifty-five pounds a few days later, telling her nothing of his tramp half over London to obtain their second-hand value to the uttermost. This money she kept as her reserve fund, and she had her reward in the blessed sense of security it gave her when things went wrong, and with each step along the down-grade the money grew larger as social needs grew less.

CHAPTER III

When the door of his study had closed, John Cardew, placing the parcel from Jellaby and Hodge upon the table, sat down beside it to think.

He knew that his wife was also thinking on the other side of the door, which had its dingy buff-coloured paint knocked and scarred with the ill-usage of previous lodgers. The shut door, which seemed just now to be so typical of that which every one seemed so eager to close in the face of his literary efforts.

He knew what thoughts her mind would first formulate: 'He is at work. How he struggles for me and the children! Dear

John! he does too much. He must rest.' And then he remembered how strange his face had looked in the glass that morning, and became possessed of an intense desire to get up, open the door softly, and then, if discovered, to walk past the woman who was seated at work in the window as if nothing were the matter, and go into the bedroom, just to see if he really were so changed.

Resisting the desire, he sat for several minutes resting his elbows on the plain deal table, with two drawers, which had long ago replaced the walnut escritoire of more prosperous days, contemplating the brown-paper parcel, which was still unopened.

How sick he was of the MS. it contained, copied and re-copied with infinite care for construction and literary polish!

And yet, after all, what did it avail? Nothing. The novel came back after absences of variable length—generally of from two to three months—with depressing persistence.

It was nearly six months' work, during which period, although he had worked feverishly in odd hours at more ephemeral things, he had earned a few guineas, and that was all.

Had he really become old-fogeyish ? Were the novel's subject and matter really so out of date that no one would undertake its publication ?

With Jellaby and Hodge's polite letter of refusal before him, he cut the string of the parcel. The fact that the MS. it contained had an indefinable air of not having been recently read fell as a balm upon his sore heart.

How sick he was of those opening sentences, which he had written, and re-written again, to ensure a good effect : '"Very well, I have no more to say," exclaimed Gerald Austen, regarding the tearful girl before him'! The opening words had burnt themselves long ago into his brain, and now revived with renewed force.

When he had written the story, the pages of which he now turned over with so heavy a heart, he had even been interested in it. Cecily had told him it was good; but what was her opinion against those of the four publishers who had seen it—or had the opportunity of doing so—and had declined it?

'But there are plenty more,' as Cecily had said. He must send it to one of these without delay. Where? He was too tired to think—somewhere, anywhere, so that he could earn something.

Taking up an old copy of the *Bookman*, he settled on a firm, wrote the note to accompany the MS., did up the parcel, and directed it.

Then he sat still for a time, thinking, unable to work, with the sweat-beads standing out upon his forehead at the thought of the possibility of the MS. again being refused.

All the while he heard Cecily's movements in the other room. Of late he had become

strangely nervous; once these soft, as it were hushed, movements had soothed him, these passings to and fro, doing things which men vaguely wonder at when they see the results; lately they irritated him. To-day they disturbed the work, which, however, quite independently of them, he knew would not have been done, so he got up, and prepared to go out.

If he could only get away from everything!

'Are you going out, dear?' asked Cecily, as he came across to the window with the parcel in his hand.

'Yes, somehow I cannot work. It is no good my tackling that chapter after all. I can think of nothing. What shall I do, Cecily—what shall I do if this goes on?'

'Rest, dear. Oh, I wish we could afford for you to have a real holiday! To go right away somewhere — right away into the country or by the seaside. There are

homes and holiday homes for every one nowadays except poor authors, who need them as much as most.'

'It is out of the question,' replied Cardew, hastily, lest she should suggest some one more personal sacrifice for his sake.

'I could not afford the time, to begin with,' he continued firmly, whilst in his heart he knew his work, this important work which would even have kept him tied to his desk had he been rich instead of poor, was so much fruitless toil after all. 'You see,' with a pitiful assumption of urgency, 'it must be done. There is no question about it; it must be done, dear.'

'I see, I see, of course.'

And then she helped him into his best coat, brushed his hat, and took his gloves from a drawer in the little crazy-legged work-table by her side.

She was so particular still about all these things. Whatever she lacked herself, her

husband must go about like a gentleman. 'It is a sheer matter of business,' she used to say, when he objected to the expense of his gloves being cleaned or a new coat being purchased, when a new dress was evidently so much more needed by her.

She had a high opinion of the dignity of literature, had Cecily Cardew, even though a man could not live by it. Besides, as she often said, 'geniuses may not nowadays appear in a shabby coat, at least not literary geniuses. Long hair is all that remains to them.'

And Cardew was forced to admit that there was something to be said in favour of creating a good impression.

Indeed, most of the men who were successful nowadays appeared, both in their portraits and in ordinary life, in immaculate frock-coats, which it would have been ridiculous to have assumed were borrowed.

Thanks to his wife's tender sophistries

and care, John Cardew always sallied forth from the meanness of Ophelia Road like a gentleman.

At first, as was perhaps only natural, Mrs. Morriston regarded his gentility with little favour. 'If there's one thing more than another I can't abide, as I always used to tell poor Morriston,' she was wont to say to Rosy Vere, a lodger of somewhat dubious reputation, 'it's to see a man do all the dressin', and the wife go that shabby'; and the girl of immaculate petticoats and flashy dress agreed. After a while, however, Mrs. Morriston altered her opinion, admitting to herself that 'Mrs. Cardew is a plucky one and no mistake. And, after all, I like to see a woman who makes her man hold his head up, and does it herself.'

John Cardew was a handsome man; and when he left the house and turned to glance up at the window at which he knew his wife would be standing, she experienced one

of those glad, brief moments of possession ere he vanished with long, swift strides down the street and round the corner.

And then—well, then tears came into her eyes, and she could no longer see the houses opposite, save indistinctly, as a blurred mass of obtrusive ugliness.

At the corner of an adjacent street, Cardew took an omnibus which ran to Gray's Inn Road. He was a pretty frequent patron, for to ride was almost cheaper than the wear and tear of shoe leather. And walking, besides tiring him terribly of late, was apt to encourage appetite, the means of satisfying which he did not possess—two things to be avoided.

The 'bus was already in motion when he reached the corner; but 'the hold gent, what arter all ain't hold, Jim,' as the conductor put it, was always waited for; and so the Jim referred to put his foot on the brake, and listened for the stamp which would

tell him the well-known passenger was inside.

On this bright June morning a terrible fear began to formulate itself in Cardew's mind, to the exclusion of almost everything else. As a rule, he found plenty of interest in studying the occupants of the 'bus, with its advertisement-covered interior, shabby crimson-velvet cushions, and damaged paint-work. But to-day even the girl with a story in her face, seated with defiant attitude in the far corner, dressed in fashionably unbecoming colours, failed to interest him. And the work-girl opposite, clad in rusty black, with a cough on even this warm June day, anæmic, and with death written on her face, held his attention but for a moment. Only sufficiently long, indeed, for him to recognise the fact that, for a writer of 'new' fiction, the girl would have formed an all-sufficient *motif* for a slender sex-study in the 'Dominant' series. The shabby man in

the corner near the door, who fidgeted, and crossed his feet awkwardly so as to hide a slit in the side of his patent-leather boots, through which a strip of cotton sock showed, attracted him for an instant, because his face proclaimed him a gentleman, because they were both travelling the same road. But the interest aroused was transitory, and Cardew returned to the fearful thing which stood, as it were, right in front of him.

The 'bus rumbled on towards the city with a chattering vibration of glass when its wheels struck the tram lines, and a swaying, staggering motion, as if overcome by the heat of the shadeless roads along which it ran; past the corners of by-streets, where unwanted children were playing, hatless and shoeless, in the overpowering heat, which gave excuse to the women to idly stand in their doorways with bare arms and half-undressed in search of a draught of air.

Down these by-streets the heated air

hung like a gauze veil, vibrating, shimmering, and mysteriously quivering. In the distance, behind the 'bus, along the main travelled road, was the same visible heat, only ceasing where the sharp shadows, like dark grey silhouettes, were thrown across the pavement into the roadway.

Cardew paid his fare mechanically, and was too absorbed in his thoughts to notice that the 'bus was about to turn into Holborn.

''Olborn,' said the conductor, touching him lightly, though familiarly, on the shoulder, so often had his silent passenger travelled to the point of stoppage.

'Thanks,' said Cardew, noticing for the first time that the 'bus was empty, 'I had forgotten.'

When he had crossed the road to the shady side, the conductor stepped to the front of the 'bus.

'Hi! matey,' he said, indicating Cardew

ere he was swallowed up by the stream of people, 'e's terrible down, 'e is—'e's a gent too. Never looks after the girls, 'e don't. Ain't like some of them; 'e's got a good missus too.'

'Garn, 'ow d' ye know?'

'Never you mind. Wait till you've got a missus. Then you'll know.'

Cardew walked along Holborn and Newgate Street, and at length found his way through a shady by-street into Paternoster Row.

He had climbed many a time the long, dark flight of stairs which confronted him on turning into the doorway of No. 409. He was too well seasoned to feel any trepidation; and so, though he had a sad heart, he knocked with a firm hand at the door on the top of the stairs, across the ground glass of which appeared in large letters the words, 'CLERKS' OFFICE,' and in smaller letters below them, 'Inquiries.'

'Is Mr. Hollings in?' Cardew inquired of a sharp-featured boy, who, gorgeous in a necktie of many colours, knotted round a dubiously white collar, had come forward to the ink-stained mahogany counter in response to Cardew's knock.

'Yes, sir. D'ye want to see him?'

Cardew nodded his head.

'What name, please?'

'John March Cardew.'

'Just step inside here,' opening a glazed door co-terminous with the long counter-like desk, disclosing thereby a small waiting-room in which there were two leather-seated chairs, 'and I'll go and see.'

Five minutes later Cardew was seated in the publisher's private room. A room surrounded with bookshelves, packed with copies of the volumes in Fiction, Poetry, and General Literature which the firm, represented by Mr. Brant Hollings, had issued during the ten years or so of its successful existence.

Mr. Brant Hollings made some pretence of publishing on philanthropic lines, but this fact detracted not a whit from his ability to make a good bargain. He knew Cardew slightly; in more prosperous days he had paid him fairly good prices for a couple of books, but had tried to 'drive a bargain' over a third, and in doing so the two men disagreed.

As he climbed up the stairs, Cardew had wondered vaguely whether it was altogether wise of him to offer his MS. in such a quarter.

'Sit down, Mr. Cardew,' exclaimed the publisher, who immediately himself got up to stand on the hearth-rug, so that his brown bearded face had a background of framed original drawings, which were hung over the bric-à-brac encumbered mantelshelf.

'I have called in to see if this novel might not suit you,' said Cardew, untying the parcel upon the corner of the table, and taking out the note which he had written to

leave with it, should Mr. Hollings prove unseeable.

'I 'm fearfully overdone with novels,' explained the publisher, with an airy assumption of literary repletion. 'I think it is only fair to say so at the outset. My series are full up for months to come. I have dozens of MSS. offered for each one I am able to accept. All the big names are anxious to appear in the series; I have no difficulty whatever as to that, I can assure you.'

'Yes, yes,' exclaimed the other hastily, looking up at the tall, burly figure with its head obscuring a wash-drawing of Italian scenery in a Birket Foster frame. 'You must be overdone. But this is altogether too long for any series. It is of two-volume length. And——'

'Oh, two-volume length!' interpolated the other. 'That may make a slight difference. But still it will have to be a good story for me to be able to touch it.'

'I hope you will find it so,' Cardew answered hesitatingly. 'I think it would prove a success if——' and then he stopped with an overpowering sense of the degradation of thus crying his own wares.

'No,' he thought fiercely, 'nothing shall make me descend to that,' so he rose hastily, saying—

'I'll leave it for your consideration, Mr. Hollings. It would be a great favour if you will let me have a decision as promptly as you conveniently can.'

'I will place the MS. in my reader's hands at once,' Brant Hollings replied. 'You shall have my decision in a fortnight, and let us hope that I may be able to make you an offer for it, Mr. Cardew. Good-day.'

On leaving the Row, Cardew made his way into St. Paul's Churchyard, and thence down Ludgate Hill to a small cook-shop in Farringdon Street. Money was of consequence, and, as in everything else, his sinking

fortunes might have been easily and accurately traced by the status of the restaurants he had successively patronised during the last three years.

For a long time he had almost felt ashamed of being seen coming out of such a place—the resort of packers, carmen, and messengers. But when once the step was taken, he discovered with a somewhat melancholy satisfaction that he had hit unknowingly upon a place where one could get, as the card stated, 'the cheapest meal in London.' That was the main point, so, choosing a dark, quiet corner, he became an *habitué* whenever he was obliged to come to the city.

A frock-coat and a silk hat, even if shabby, singled him out for some amount of curiosity on the first few occasions.

''E's mistook 'is Club,' a drayman said to a companion, with a wink.

'Interviewin' on 'ow the poor live on

tuppenny busters,' was the comment of a weedy-looking junior clerk.

'Down on his luck,' was another remark, which reached Cardew's ears on the occasion of his first visit.

'Down on his luck.' 'Ah, that 's just it,' he thought. And the desire to admit the fact, and thus do away with the need for further speculation, almost overpowered him.

All that sort of annoyance, however, was now happily past, and out of the scorching heat Cardew turned with the celerity of a frequent patron into the odorous shade—if only comparative coolness—of the low-ceiled dining-saloon.

He never told Cecily that his dinner cost him fourpence or fivepence, as the case might be. What was the good? If she asked him, he said he had dined well—had had all he wanted. And if she inquired where, he said indefinitely, 'Near Fleet Street,' and she knew that there were some

good restaurants in the neighbourhood, and was satisfied.

The girls were very attentive to him, and so his sausages were never overdone, nor his potatoes 'sad.'

'I know a gentleman when I see one,' the elder of the two had declared; and the younger, whose opinions were always coloured by her companion's views, accepted the implied certificate.

At first, until he ceased to take much interest in anything except his own depressing affairs, Cardew used to be at times immensely entertained by his fellow-diners, and their views upon sport, art, literature, and the drama, all off-shoots of their various occupations, carried on mostly in Fleet Street and its purlieus.

Once he was grateful to a boy at the next table, who was reading a copy of one of his novels, for his pronouncement that the tale was 'rippin', and got it out of the tuppenny

box too.' Oh, that 'tuppenny box,' the ultimate goal of how many budding ambitions!

To-day it was different; he was there, seated at a table in his own far corner, but he troubled nothing at all about his neighbours or his surroundings.

After a little while the place grew darker, things near him began to recede. Surely he must be near the seashore, there was such a thundering in his ears, and then black darkness.

'The gent 's fainted.'

'It 's a fit.'

'No, it ain't. You shut up. 'E 's comin' to.'

Where was he? How did he get stretched full length on the slippery bench covered in American cloth? And with his collar off, the hair on his temples wet, and his coat and waistcoat open.

'You came over queer, sir,' said the elder girl. 'I think you fainted, but you 'll be all

right now. I've done it myself in the hot weather,' in a reassuring tone, 'when I first had to stand all these hours, and wasn't brought up to it neither.'

With brusqueness, almost amounting to rudeness, Cardew thanked the girl, sat up, put on his collar, and then as quickly as he could paid his bill, and went rapidly, though unsteadily, out of the shop.

He had never fainted before.

He seemed to remember nothing; he even wondered how he came to be in the shop, in the City at all. He must say nothing to Cecily. No, nothing. It was doubtless only the heat. And yet, and yet. There was that dread spectre, and with that there was no knowing.

CHAPTER IV

'THERE is something wrong, dear!' exclaimed Cecily as Cardew sank down into a seat.

'No, I am only a little over-tired, that is all,' he answered almost mechanically. 'The heat has been horrible in the City.'

'Yes; but you look so unusually pale. I am sure there is something seriously wrong.' And she knew she was right, although he still persisted, and exclaimed almost sharply—

'No, I assure you; I am tired — that is all.'

Cecily Cardew made no rejoinder; she merely got his slippers, drew down the blind

at the side window, through which the fierce afternoon sun was streaming, and went on with her work of letting down a serge skirt for Sylvia.

Cardew closed his eyes, and, without appearing to do so, his wife regarded him earnestly; and as she did, the same spectre which had begun to haunt the man crept close to the woman's heart also, and clutched it with an icy hand.

Cecily stitched on, patiently waiting for him to unclose them, and wondering what she would do when all Sylvia's dresses were lengthened and altered, and economy of that kind could no longer be practised.

Things could not go on in this way for ever. Bills would soon again become due, and there was something terribly distasteful to both of them in being in debt. Thank God! they had never been that yet; but how long would she be able to say, 'I owe nothing which I cannot pay'?

Suddenly Cardew opened his eyes, and remarked, as a man often does, as if she knew all about it—

'I've seen Brant Hollings, and I left *'Twixt Two Opinions* for him to see.' Then he paused, as if expecting her to say something.

'I'm sorry you went to him,' Cecily remarked slowly after a minute or so.

'I was half-afraid that you wouldn't like it,' Cardew continued, interrupting her. 'But there was just a chance, and I thought I'd try him. Why do you object? He has a very good standing.'

'Yes, I know all that, but I am afraid that he will try and take advantage of you. He must know that we have been unfortunate lately. And I so distrust him. I don't like men who pretend that their business is conducted philanthropically, any more than I do those who make a business of philanthropy. And, dear, we do want money so

badly; I don't like to trouble you; but—but——' and the woman with the beautiful sad face made a gallant attempt to force back the tears.

'Cecily, Cecily, I can't bear it! Don't, dear. There is just a chance of his taking it, and he ought to give me £50. I am tired of trying other people. You're a good woman, Cecily. I don't know what I should do without you. Unfortunately,' he went on rapidly and bitterly, getting up and resting his hand on her shoulder, 'God put a conscience in me. If He hadn't troubled me with it, I could make money like many other men. Sometimes I begin to think the devil's a better paymaster.'

'John, what are you saying? Think, what are you saying? We have much to thank God for—Sylvia, and Fred with all his naughty ways.'

'And these lodgings instead of our pretty little house,' Cardew broke in, pacing the

room. 'And the squalor and misery of the street outside, and your white tired face, and the tears you shed in the night, with your face turned away from me; and those I shed when I think you are asleep. And the children to be brought in daily contact with all that's vulgar and low. Little Sylvia to meet every day a woman who stands at the street corners, whose ways lead down into the pit. We have all this to be thankful for. Yes, we have all this to thank God for.'

The woman shuddered.

He had never before spoken like this. There must be something strangely wrong.

He was commencing to speak again. 'They think it is only the poor—the very poor—who suffer; but it is we whose souls are taken out of the gutter, we who have brains to feel the ignominy of debt, who truly suffer.'

There were footsteps coming up the stairs,

and Cecily put her hand up as if to stay the torrent of bitterness.

'Sylvia: hush, John.'

When she entered, a ray of sunshine seemed to come in with her.

'A kiss, daddie, please. How tired you look! I know you've been working too hard again. I wouldn't let you do it, if I were mother; but she's as bad—always stitching away at something. I'm sure that skirt won't let down any more now, and I shall be glad if it won't mean mother having to get a new one for me.

'I hate long dresses; they may be dignified, but they're a terrible nuisance, always getting in the way. Fred isn't half grateful enough for having been born a boy.'

'That's chatter enough, Sylvia dear,' interrupted Cecily. 'Father's tired, and tea has been ready ever so long. Go and take off your things.'

Meal-times were almost the happiest parts

of the day to the girl, because she sat near her father, and some of the indescribable gloom which of late had seemed to hover over the Cardew household, and at times invest her life with indefinable sadness, was at such times somewhat dissipated.

Both her father and mother made an effort to be cheerful, and then there were the doings of the day to be discussed; the hundred and one things which had amused or interested her; the trivialities, which her keen sense of observation turned to account; the incidentals of the High School life, in which her mother always seemed so interested.

To-night, however, her father, who usually took some part in the conversation, was unwontedly silent. He felt a weariness, an unstrung lassitude, such as he had never before experienced.

At the end of the meal he knew, if he were not to alarm his wife, he must retire into

the stuffy study to work, as had been his custom for months.

Work at what? What for? What was the use of it all? These were the questions which presented themselves for solution so persistently nowadays, at all hours, in season and out of season—questions which, incapable of answering themselves, he never himself succeeded in answering.

'Make as little noise as you can, Sylvia, when Fred comes in,' Cardew enjoined as he rose from the table.

'Very well, father. But you know what a boy he is, and I'm not much quieter, I'm afraid.'

'You must not work late to-night, John,' said Cecily, with a troubled face, ere the study door closed. 'You're not looking well; I suppose it's the heat.'

'Don't you worry, dear; I shall be all right,' and with that the door closed.

For a minute or two Cardew gazed round

the cupboard-like room as if he had never been in it before.

He knew well enough the dwarf bookcases of stained and varnished deal which hemmed him in when he sat at his table, so conveniently at hand when he first occupied the room, and now so oppressively near. But to-night everything seemed so strange. He had even forgotten that it was Sylvia's baby fingers which had here and there pulled off the small serrated circles of the green leather shelf-edging, and wondered when the damage could have been done.

When he sat down at his desk, which was covered with old papers, MSS. that had failed to find a home, newspaper cuttings and books, he was confronted by that terrible blank page of ruled paper, flanked by a small heap of other pages, which he had thrown aside with the first few lines only written on them, futile efforts of a flagging brain to form the sentences which were to bring daily bread.

When first he had commenced to write, how suggestive these clean white pages used to prove! They were soon covered with sentences in which he took a pride, words which conveyed some clear meaning to his mind, and brought praise from those whose judgment was worth having. Now, it was all so different. When he sat down he knew that looking at the confronting paper would only serve to bring the sweat-drops of despair out on his forehead.

Every day the same drama was acted in the close little study; the same actor was shoved with trembling limbs, bewildered brain, and clamminess of terror, lest again it should be failure, before that most terrible of the audiences of one, his own consciousness. And on the other side of the thin partition sat the actor's wife, troubled lest he who actually accomplished so little should do too much.

The heat of the little room, which was

intense, though the narrow window was open at the top, the strident noises of the street, in which children played roughly, and women talked with their neighbours without leaving their own doorsteps, the sharp click of the tip-cat on the pavement immediately opposite, and the shrill cry of children quarrelling, being beaten, or in pain, to-night made no impression on the man seated at the desk. If he noticed these things at all, they seemed too far removed for him to trouble about them.

He sat motionless in front of that accusing sheet of blank paper, pen in hand.

Fred had come in: for a moment's space there had been a commotion. A cry of simulated vexation from Sylvia, as the boy gave a whistle at the lengthened skirt, which had just been slipped on as a trial, and his remark that she would soon be putting her hair up, aping the young lady and getting a waist; and then there was nothing to be

heard save the low hum of conversation being carried on in an undertone, and the occasional clatter of a cup and saucer or plate of the boy at his tea.

When the dusk began to fall, and the street grew greyer and quieter, and the shrill cries of the children less strident and less frequent, there came the usual knock at the study door; and, in response to Cardew's 'Come in,' Sylvia entered with the green-shaded lamp, a pretty play of light and shadow from it falling upon her lithe, graceful figure and piquant face.

'Mother thought you must be wanting the light, daddie. What with our dress-making and talk, I forgot all about it.'

Then, noticing that there was no trace of her father's having been at work at least for some time, she continued, 'Oh, daddie, I hope you've not been waiting! Why didn't you knock, and then I would have brought it sooner? Couldn't you see?'

'No, Sylvia,' Cardew replied abstractedly, 'I couldn't see; so I've been thinking.'

'There!' placing the lamp on the corner of the table, which she had cleared of papers. 'Shall I shut the window? No? Then I'll only pull down the blind. I mustn't interrupt you any more; and besides, I've got my lessons to do.'

A sudden idea seemed to occur to Cardew, for he said hastily, as the girl turned away—

'Stop a moment, Sylvia. Shut the door. I have something to say to you, dear. You are getting along well at school?'

'Yes, daddie. Miss Lomax thinks I am safe for the scholarship now. Won't it be lovely?'

The girl had seated herself on the edge of the table, and was wondering vaguely what her father was going to say next.

Cardew had done his best for his children as far as education was concerned. Things began to go badly with him—after a long

and serious illness—just about the time it became necessary to send Sylvia to school. But he had said to Cecily that they must make a great effort to send the girl to a good school, and Fred also when the proper time came.

Sylvia herself had so often heard him say, 'You children will have had a good education, and I am afraid that is nearly all I shall be able to ensure for you,' that the possibility of her having yet to leave school never entered her head.

'Would you be very sorry to leave the High School, dear?' Cardew asked, after a pause, glancing at her face to note the effect of his words.

'Daddie! Why, of course! I really couldn't—not before the scholarship,' and an almost frightened expression came into her violet-coloured eyes. 'Why, daddie, you wanted me to get it, and I've worked so hard—so very hard! You don't mean it,

do you?' and the girl's eyes began to fill with tears.

'No, child, no; I don't mean it,' Cardew hastily replied. 'There, be a good girl, and forget all about it. But, Sylvia, you must work hard for the scholarship right up to the last, because we're very poor just now—mother and I—and I don't know how much longer after next term I shall be able to let you remain at Miss Lomax's.'

'I'll work—never you fear, daddie,' and with a suddenly lightened heart she got off the table and, kissing her father, left him.

CHAPTER V

When the two children were in bed and asleep, Cardew and Cecily continued the talk which had been interrupted by Sylvia's entrance in the afternoon.

Things were going from bad to worse; and unwilling as Cecily always was to let her husband know what a struggle she had to make both ends meet, it had now become necessary to do so.

Their talk lasted long into the night. It was so difficult to devise any further economy, or a practicable scheme to increase the slender income.

When sitting in his chair in that room, away from pens and paper, Cardew experi-

enced once again the mirage-like sensation, that he had nothing but to get up and re-enter his study to enable him to set down, in the clearest possible manner, the ideas and sentences which had proved so elusive during the day.

When first this occurred, he had risen abruptly, and, making Cecily some excuse, had re-entered his study. But no sooner was he seated in front of the blank page, than the idea, present in his mind a moment before, was gone, and no effort succeeded in recapturing it. He suffered the agonies of forgetfulness.

He never spoke to his wife of this feeling. What was the use? If she understood at all, it would only worry her, perhaps even cause her the dread which seized upon him so frequently, and which came to him when restless and sleepless in the watches of the night; those dreary hours spent with Cecily unconscious and breathing placidly at his side.

The piece of paper in Cecily's hand was covered with sums which he had jotted down as they talked, figures which confronted them so inexorably. When he had finished writing, and Cecily had glanced over them, she felt a shock such as one experiences at the receipt of bad news.

They were in debt, and unless something were done, some literary success came, they would go on and on until the millstone around their necks dragged them down.

'What did Mr. Hollings say?' she asked, after a painful pause.

'That he might be able to take the book. That he hoped that he would be able to do so.'

'Nothing more definite?'

'No. I am afraid, Cecily, we must not build too hopefully on that. He also said the usual thing, that he was very full up. Was declining a dozen—or was it a hundred?—MSS. for each one he was able to accept.

But he hoped—yes, he said that distinctly—mine would suit him. If it does, he ought to give me enough to relieve us of anxiety for a time.'

'For a time!' It was always that now, the woman thought sadly.

Was John failing? Were his stories not so good as they used to be? What was the meaning of it all? Did her passionate love for him blind her, and was her faculty of judgment obscured thereby?

There was a sudden clatter of hoofs in the road. They stopped outside, a latch-key was thrust in the street door lock. There was a sound of a horse starting suddenly under a cut from the whip. Cicely herself started and shivered. The sounds were the same as those which at first woke her so frequently in the night till she got accustomed to them. The street door was pushed back so roughly against the passage wall that the cheaply built house itself vibrated. There were

sounds of a girl's voice raised high, and then steps coming carelessly up the stairs. Then the girl began to sing in an uncertain voice a music-hall song, the words of which grew suddenly indistinct as a room door was shut with a bang.

'Do you know the time?' exclaimed Cardew, seeming to rouse himself with an effort; 'it is past one.'

Cecily was thinking of Sylvia. What if she should have been aroused.

'Is it really so late? We had better go to bed, dear.'

The man and woman looked into each other's eyes, and saw that they were thinking the same thought.

When Cecily opened the door, whilst Cardew turned out the lamp, she started back. On the mat, framed by the doorway, with a background of pale moonlight which seemed to have become a soiled grey in passing through the uncleaned window at the

end of the shabby, narrow passage, stood Sylvia, only half-awake, with but half-opened, terrified eyes.

'Oh, mother, I am so frightened! I looked for you in your room, and you weren't there; I must have fallen asleep. Something woke me up, and I heard people coming up the stairs, and that Rosy Vere singing, and then she laughed horribly, and—and I heard a strange man's voice.'

'Never mind, dear, you 've been dreaming too, I expect,' Cecily said tenderly; and as the noises had ceased, the drowsy child began to be uncertain if she had not really dreamed. 'You are frightened. I will ask father to let you sleep with me to-night.'

When John Cardew threw himself on Sylvia's little bed, it was not to sleep. He had knelt at the side of it, vaguely thinking that, perhaps, God might hear him, in the room where an innocent child had just been sleeping peacefully.

The inarticulate cry which went up from the bottom of his soul in agony had nothing to do with him; Sylvia and Cecily—the weakest first—were those for whom he prayed. Now he was with them; perhaps some day he should be gone. And then would the God who through these last three years had sat on His throne, seemingly so far off, come down near to them?

Cecily believed in God, he knew, but then good women were always religious. He had an idea that all women were so by natural inclination. They seldom became entirely absorbed in any art to the exclusion of Him, as did men. He even, as he lay with wakeful eyes and weary though excited brain, remembered that he had once written in one of his books: 'God has no rivals to fear in a good woman's heart save her husband and children,' and Cecily had said she thought it was, in a sense, very true.

When he was gone, perhaps, what men

called 'luck,' and Christians spoke of as 'Providence,' would change.

At last he fell asleep, and it was not till Sylvia knocked at the door to come in and dress that he woke up to find himself gone to bed in his things.

Calling out, 'Wait a minute, dear,' he hastily washed to disguise the aberration of which somehow he felt strangely ashamed. On opening the door, however, he was reassured by the girl's exclamation, 'Why, daddie, you are early! Mother didn't think you would be awake, much less up. I feel so awfully sorry I turned you out last night, and now I can't remember at all clearly what it was for. I think I was frightened at some noise or other.'

'Yes, yes,' he said, and the white figure with the grey shawl wrapped round its shoulders slipped across the threshold and firmly closed the door by the bolt which had been put to replace the long-lost key.

During the week following nothing unusual occurred in the Cardew household. Indeed, now scarcely anything save the children's departure for and return from school, and the postman's infrequent visits, broke the monotony of existence to the occupants of Mrs. Morriston's principal rooms at 26 Ophelia Road.

Cardew felt better again. He was able to do some amount of work, although he soon tired, and a return of the terrible blankness and fearful nervous sweats immediately resulted. As yet he assured himself that Cecily had noticed nothing unusual, and he continued his gallant fight against his terrors, and the spectre horror they produced, behind the closed door of his study.

In accordance with a suggestion of Sefton Bell's, whom he had met at the Literary Club—the one luxury he permitted himself, on Cecily's earnest representations that it would never do for him to fall out of touch

with literary things altogether,—he had recently written some slight sketches and articles in the hope that they might bring in a few guineas. Several, fortunately, got accepted; but a man cannot live by chance articles merely (let alone a family), and he was moreover quite disqualified by his general inclination and literary training from continuing such a course of writing for any length of time. Still it was something, as Cecily cheerfully said; and she understood the effort it had been for him to descend to this ephemeral sort of work, and loved him all the better for his renunciation.

The idea that he should abandon literature, should seek to fill a niche in some other walk in life, simply never suggested itself to her mind or his. Whatever happened—strange to say—the position was literature or starvation, not literature or something else.

Cecily would probably have opened her eyes at such a suggestion, and replied, 'My

husband is a literary man; of course, he cannot do anything else. Literature cannot spare him. No indeed, the idea is preposterous.'

With Cardew's wife, as with himself, it was literature first and the rest of the professions nowhere. And it mattered nothing that a valet or a clever mechanic earned more than he did.

Even Sefton Bell, a happy-go-lucky journalistic free-lance, would have agreed with her. No, the thing was quite impossible to Cardew, and so there was an end of it.

After a few days' work of this miscellaneous character, Cardew again tackled his book. For a time all went well. The change of work had acted somewhat on his brain as a change of air would have done upon a fatigued or exhausted body; he wrote fairly easily for two days, and then the old terror revived, the page once more presented its white surface in vain for the words to be set down

upon it, and the cold sweat of exasperation at the futility of his efforts broke out on his forehead and body afresh.

It was after a day of torturing inaction that the last post brought the expected letter from Brant Hollings.

Cecily came in with it to him. There was an anxious look on her face, which even the carefully shaded lamp failed to render invisible.

'Is this all? There is no parcel?' Cardew added, upon turning the letter over and observing from whom it came.

'No, dear, none.'

'Thank God!' he said mechanically, as though addressing no one in particular. 'Then there is some hope.'

Cecily sat on the arm of the chair and placed her hand on his shoulder. 'Aren't you going to open it?'

'Yes. I was only thinking. It means so much, Cecily.'

He took up an inkstained bone paper-knife and opened the letter.

Cecily leaned over and read it :—

'409 PATERNOSTER ROW,
LONDON, E.C.

'Telegraphic Address,
"Integrity," London.

'DEAR SIR,—

'Re '*Twixt Two Opinions* MS.

'My reader's report is so far favourable that I am disposed to make you the following offer, viz. £25, payable on passing of final proofs, for a first edition, to consist of the number of copies which it may be deemed advisable to print. Any future edition (if any) to be the subject of mutual agreement and arrangement.

'In making you the foregoing offer, I am to a certain extent speculating, and may very possibly lose on the transaction. As I remarked during our interview of some ten days ago, it is increasingly difficult to make any novel of that length do more than pay expenses and a small sum over, unless the work of the very front rank men.

'Should you feel disposed to accept these terms, I shall be glad if you will call in some time during the present week, when the agreement can be ready for signing.—Believe me, dear sir, yours faithfully,

'BRANT HOLLINGS.

'JOHN MARCH CARDEW, Esq.'

There was a cloud of bitter disappointment upon Cardew's face as he turned to Cecily and asked, 'What shall I do?'

In her own heart the feeling was none the less keen, but she would not let it appear.

'Accept the offer.'

'Accept it! Take £25 for nearly six months' work! It is nothing less than a beggarly offer. If it is worth that, it is worth more. Speculation indeed! Nonsense! Brant Hollings is not the man to speculate — except with a sure profit in view.'

Cecily let him run on. At length he ceased speaking.

Then she said with her hand clasped over his—

'Dear, to me it is worth far more. To me it is worth far more. To me it is one of the best books ever written, for we have lived parts of it together. But, dear, we cannot disguise that we are terribly poor, so poor that we cannot afford to reject even the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table. God knows how I long to tell you to refuse it, how I wish that you might write and decline the money with dignity. But, but there is Sylvia——'

John Cardew covered his eyes with his hands for a moment. That last argument settled it.

'Very well, I will write "Yes," and say I will call in during the week. But I shall stipulate that I must be paid at once.'

'There 's my brave husband!' she said, for she knew how the battle had waged, and left him without speaking again.

When the study door had closed, the pent-up despair of the man broke out.

'If I were alone, if she and the children did not starve with me, I would throw the money in his face! Oh, my God, twenty-five pounds for six months' toil, for all the agony, the burden of dead hopes!'

After a few minutes' almost incoherent murmuring, he calmed himself with an effort, wrote the letter, and went out to post it. The cool air tempted him past the pillar-box at the corner of the street; and at length, from the crest of an adjacent road, which, with its small semi-detached villas with trim window-boxes and two limes apiece in miniature front gardens, was so near and yet so far removed from the meanness and poverty of Ophelia Road, he could see the curtain of luminous cloud hanging over the city, the murmurous roar of whose throbbing life found an aching echo in his brain.

As he stood there, a solitary figure in the

deep shadow cast by one of the houses, he longed with an indescribable longing to trample on those who trampled him down, on those who had destroyed his dreams, and for a time reality, of success; to see that lowering mammoth city, with all its failure, even its success, destroyed.

Nothing save such a mighty retribution would avenge his wrongs.

When he turned away, he started, almost expecting to see his own face staring at him on an impalpable curtain—the face he had imagined he saw in the glass after a restless night.

CHAPTER VI

THE twenty-five pounds Cardew received for his MS. *'Twixt Two Opinions* melted away with startling rapidity; indeed, with a celerity which caused Cecily many sleepless hours. When she had paid the bills, that had such a terrible facility for accumulating, and had purchased the few necessaries which had been done without till such a thing was no longer possible, only a very few pounds remained.

The novel was not a pronounced success.

The younger order of critics, seemingly unaware that Cardew had written half a dozen good novels whilst they were still in knickerbockers, treated it as a 'first effort, indicative more of promise than fulfilment';

or, treating the story in the semi-jocosely sarcastic manner so much in vogue, referred to it as 'aptly named, the author having evidently himself two opinions as to the working out of the situation chosen as the central idea.' The older men, who had known Cardew in more prosperous days, took a different line. They treated it either as 'an experiment which we cannot advise the author to pursue further,' frankly urged him 'to return to the *metier* in which he had earned a well-deserved success,' or, as one rather brutally asserted, 'there can be no two opinions about this book. It is bad. In fact, the author is evidently worked out, and his imagination at the point of extinction.'

It was this last review appearing in the columns of an organ of literary criticism enjoying the premier position amongst its contemporaries that caused Cecily to read the book again herself.

When she sat herself down to read in the

terrible airless heat of an August afternoon alone in the dingy lodgings—for Cardew and the children, at her earnest request, had gone to spend the day on Hampstead Heath—there was a great and all-absorbing fear clutching at her heart-strings.

What if the unknown critics' verdict were correct!

'No,' she said to herself over and over again, 'no, God would never put that burden upon her. Not the God that she believed in. Not He whom, when things went wrong, she could stretch out her hands to and seem to touch. Surely not, surely not.'

She read on and on, taking no heed of time, forgetting that she had had no food, her love carrying her over the hard places; those where at first reading there seemed a confusion of meaning, such as several of the reviewers had noted.

At length she finished the last page and closed the volume.

They were nearly all wrong; yes, there was no doubt about it.

The critics did not understand the hidden meaning of the story. They were either fools or dolts. She could write better criticism herself. John, her John, had written a fine novel, one that had brought tears to her eyes, the reason for which, when she thought of it, she failed to discover.

The stern desire to discover the truth which had possessed her at the outset had been insensibly abandoned as she read on, and now, after the strain, she felt the room unspeakably lonely.

It was quite late when Cardew and the children came in. The latter were full of the joy of living, and brought something of the fresh air they had themselves breathed into the narrow confines of their home in Ophelia Road.

There was something strangely wearied in the attitude of the man, and for the first

time Cecily recognised with a pang that physical exertion began to tell on him unduly.

When the children had gone to their bedrooms to wash, Cecily rose and threw her soft, clinging arms round her husband's neck.

'John,' she said, looking anxiously into his face, 'I have been reading the book; I have read it all through; and, dear, the reviewers are all wrong—you mustn't mind what they say. They simply don't know.'

They were standing so that Cardew's face was quite in the shadow, or Cecily, when she kissed him and clung to him, would surely have noticed the weary and even strange expression upon it. Her inner sensitiveness must, however, have caught some hint of this, for she said—

'John, I have been so lonely! It is very foolish, but I think I am a little unnerved about something. You will never leave me for long?'

'No,' he replied absently; 'no, Cecily. Why should I?'

Then after a pause: 'You've read '*Twixt Two Opinions* through again. What a strange idea! But we won't talk about it, will we? It ought to have been better. If only I had to write it over again.'

But, all the same, he had the feeling that it would have made no difference after all.

Later in the evening Sefton Bell dropped in, as he occasionally did. Some remarks he had overheard at the Literary Club had made him anxious about Cardew.

He was a much younger man than his friend, altogether of a more modern type. Not trammelled greatly by literary ideals, he had succeeded where Cardew had failed. But he never pretended to cheaply despise what he did not himself possess. Somehow or other, with all his Bohemianism, Sefton Bell was a man to be depended upon; and Cecily, who had regarded him with clear, questioning eyes

the first time he came, had taken him into the family circle without hesitation. So the young fellow, who seemed so full of energy, and was so modestly flushed with success, came to know much more than any one else of the state of affairs with the Cardews.

On this particular evening he went away far sadder at heart than usual. Things were sure to be exaggerated, but there could be no reasonable doubt that there was a noticeable change in John Cardew. In the family circle it was not so apparent. But whilst talking over literary matters in the little study, where the two men had retired for a chat, Bell's suspicions received ample confirmation.

When he left, Cardew happened to be out of the room, so he said tentatively to Cecily, 'Don't you think Mr. Cardew is rather overworked?'

Cecily paused for a moment, and then re-

plied hesitatingly, 'I don't think he is very well, but he has not been working quite so hard lately,' adding somewhat bitterly: 'You see, there is no need.'

'Perhaps he is tired,' Sefton Bell said meditatively, 'but I don't think him looking very well,' and then the subject was dropped.

However, whilst he was walking towards the 'bus terminus, he thought: 'There is something seriously wrong with Cardew. I don't think I should take things quite so calmly if I were his wife.' And then his own work obtruded itself upon him, thrusting for a time the Cardews and their affairs quite into the background.

In Cardew's own mind there had been at first some faint hope of a second edition of his novel. Following hard on some of the least favourable reviews had come several which, doubtless prompted by feelings of friendship, had noticed the most striking

portions of what Sefton Bell had reluctantly admitted to be a singularly unequal book, and charitably passed over most of its manifest shortcomings. Even if the author had been cognisant of this gentle log-rolling, he would scarcely have been astonished at it; for the pastime was a favourite one with critics, one was always given to understand, and why should it always be to them that have? This hope, like so many others during the last three years, was doomed to disappointment. Not only did *'Twixt Two Opinions* fail to create such a demand as to warrant reprinting; but Brant Hollings frankly told Cardew, when he called in to see how the sales worked out, that he had nearly lost money by the venture. What this statement actually meant, Cardew did not succeed in discovering.

When he told Cicely, she set her face very firmly.

At times she felt almost conquered; the

heat of the summer had tried her severely, and she recognised that it was almost the last rally.

Cardew had lately seemed very exhausted. A weary look had crept into his eyes, an expression which occasionally filled her with a vague foreboding. Often she lay awake almost all night long startled by the indefinite noises of a London street, at last only half-slumbering till daybreak. She must do something.

But what was there for her to do? There were not many means of earning money open to a lady who had no special talents other than those inherent with tender, self-sacrificing womanliness.

What could she do? What could she do? The question repeated itself over and over again in her mind, and at last an answer came. There was no hesitation. She could do it, that was sufficient. To-morrow she would set about it. And then, weary enough,

she turned over, even glad of the one more sacrifice, and slept.

During breakfast next morning, if John Cardew had not been so absorbed in his own thoughts, he might have noticed that the colour in his wife's face was unusually deep, and that there was even a suspicion of nervousness about her manner and movements. Most women have a feeling almost approaching reverence for custom and tradition. Cecily was no exception to the general rule; so far as she knew, no woman in her family had ever specifically earned anything, and the idea of doing so was eminently distasteful to her. Not that she saw anything derogatory in the practice, but merely because of its somewhat repellent novelty.

She had decided to say nothing to Cardew about it: she might fail after all; and he was sure to offer some objection. It was not easy to combat him; the logic of a woman's 'must' was not always an effective

answer, she had found. And, indeed, she mistrusted herself. What if she should be over-persuaded by him? Was she so determined on this sacrifice as she imagined? These questions and fears decided, when he retired to his study, and the children had gone, she found herself alone, so, taking up a stray copy of a ladies' paper which had been sent them, she carefully copied out the address and particulars therefrom. Then, after writing a short note, which she placed on the handle of the study door, she dressed herself and walked hurriedly down the street, lest her husband should catch sight of her and, suspecting her errand, call her back.

An hour later she alighted from the 'bus in which she had travelled to her destination, and had but little difficulty in finding the number in Great Portland Street of which she was in search.

Womanlike, she reconnoitred, and then spent several minutes in feasting her eyes

upon the dainty feminine garments displayed in the window.

The shop had one of those unobtrusive and even shabby exteriors which are not infrequently associated with what has got to be called an 'exclusive' *clientèle*. To a woman's mind the satisfactory display of luxury and good taste in the narrow and even old-fashioned windows suggested infinite possibilities within.

Just as she was entering, and, indeed, whilst she still had a trembling hand on the door-handle, a card in the side window with the words

> FINE NEEDLEWOMAN WANTED
> APPLY WITHIN

caught her eye.

There could be no mistake, then, and this fact gave her a certain amount of satisfaction and courage.

When she entered, and found herself con-

fronted by even more daintiness and luxury of attire than she had anticipated, she scarcely possessed courage to reply to the polite inquiry of the fashionably dressed young lady who came forward to wait upon her.

'What can I have the pleasure of showing you, madame?'

'Nothing, thank you. I saw an advertisement in the *Queen*, and I have come about that,' Cecily replied, with a consciousness that her voice was very low and far-off sounding.

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' was the answer, in a quickly assumed patronising tone. 'You had better see Miss Jemmans.'

'I suppose we 're not suited?' continued the girl, speaking over her shoulder to a companion who was 'dressing' a showcase.

'Not that I know of,' with a glance at Cecily.

Cecily Cardew had learned one art, that of the needle, as few modern women do. The taste for fine needlework had run in her

family ; and so when Miss Jemmans produced her daintiest garments—made for the trousseau of a peer's daughter—and said, 'That is the style of thing we want. If you can work like that, we shall be able to give you a trial at all events,' she felt no hesitation in saying, 'Yes, I can do it.'

She had heard something about 'sweating'; she had been led from what she knew to expect very little for such work ; and when the sum was named, it surprised her that she could make so much.

When the parcel, containing two 'model' garments, a length or two of lawn, cambric, and lace, such as Cecily at the time thought it would be a delight to handle, was ready, she had so far become accustomed to her strange *rôle* as to reply to Miss Jemmans' request for her name and address without embarrassment or hesitation.

'Cardew.'

'Mrs. Cardew ? '

'Yes.'

The forewoman looked at her keenly whilst Cecily hunted for a card, with an idea of giving it to her, only to change her mind on remembering that it bore her Clapham address. The inspection was evidently satisfactory; for as the young lady who opened the door for her remarked to her companion in a tone of mild astonishment, 'Fancy, Jemmans never asked for a deposit!'

As for Cecily, she knew nothing of this special favour of exemption from what would have overtaxed the slender sum in her possession, but she had obtained work that she could do and that she liked. Surely Providence had smiled upon her.

CHAPTER VII

CARDEW had not noticed Cecily's absence; and even when he came out of his study just before one o'clock, and found her engaged, just as if she had been there all the morning, in 'cutting out' upon the rickety oval dining-table, the presence of dainty lace and yards of the finest cambric in themselves conveyed no inkling of what had occurred to his somewhat preoccupied masculine intelligence.

Even when Cecily, with a flush, half of pride at her success and half of fear lest he should be vexed at what she had done, commenced to explain, he cut her off short, evidently supposing she was making some garments for Sylvia or herself, saying—

'It's all right, dear; you're not one to spend money unnecessarily. No doubt they were wanted.'

Cecily regarded him with amusement. 'I suppose, John dear, you'll not be in the least surprised that this lace cost, some of it, five shillings a yard, if not more. And this cambric,' tossing up a billowy mass of the fine white material as she spoke, 'not much less.'

Cardew's face was a study, but his look of blank amazement was too deeply tinged with distress and concern for Cecily to keep him unenlightened any longer. So, sitting down on the arm of the chair in which he had seated himself, she said—

'These things are neither for Sylvia nor me, John; they are for young Lady Aline Templetown, who is going to be married.'

'Whatever have you got to do with it?' ejaculated Cardew, in a tone of surprised inquiry.

'I am going to make some of her trousseau, and be well paid for doing so.'

'Paid?'

Cardew's first impulse was to forbid Cecily so demeaning herself. Surely they had not fallen quite so low. And then his mind was possessed once more by that terrible rage against fate, and he could have got up and trampled the dainty lace-trimmed garments and snowy fabrics underfoot.

In the end, however, Cecily had her way. With delicate feminine diplomacy she showed him that it would be an intense pleasure for her to exercise her talent in this way. She could never hope to keep up her proficiency in the art of the needle. 'You know, John,' she wound up her argument, 'I cannot afford to buy such materials, and what I receive'—she had been on the point of saying 'earn'—'will at least pay for Sylvia's winter things and mine.'

Cardew made no further objection.

He was not altogether satisfied, however.

He looked upon Cecily's earning anything as a distinct disgrace, in which, through his inability to make such a course of action unnecessary, he bore no inconsiderable part. After Cecily's protestations of satisfaction, manlike, it never even occurred to him that she had made any personal sacrifice. So he simply said, 'Very well. After all, no one need know' (which made her choke back some rising tears), and left her to her work.

Cecily was passionately fond of this fine, intricate art of the needle, and of the elaborate multitudinous tuckings and cobwebby insertions and trimmings, which under her nimble fingers transformed the simplest of garments into the most complicated.

Through the week as she stitched away she thought of all the happy girlhood days, and that later time when she had been engaged over similar work for herself, the remnants of which she still treasured. And

then, although she was no longer young, she wove romances whilst fashioning these garments, which in very truth were, as Sylvia said, 'fit for a fairy princess,' and her needle darted in and out with marvellous rapidity.

Indeed, she was almost too busy to notice any change in Cardew.

At meal-times he seemed somewhat more preoccupied than usual; but, after all, there was nothing very alarming in that. For a time her work absorbed her more than she was aware. The children when at home were by no means neglected, but things had so arranged themselves that autumn as to leave her unusually free. Fred had joined technical classes at a neighbouring School of Science and Art, and Sylvia when not reading for her scholarship loved nothing better than to sit with her mother and help her with the plainer part of the sewing.

One night, not long after she had returned her first parcel of completed work, and had

heard from the forewoman that she might reckon on more or less permanent employment, she had suddenly realised a great fear as regarded Sylvia.

For the last few months the class of lodgers at Ophelia Road had deteriorated.

Rosy Vere had been supplemented by at least two other girls of similarly dubious character, and Cecily regarded this fact in the light of an additional menace to her child. Some days elapsed ere she broached the subject to Cardew, who readily agreed that they must move as soon as possible. But there was the difficulty: the rent was in arrear. And although Mrs. Morriston was singularly easy-going so far as the Cardews were concerned, it was scarcely to be expected that she would allow them to quit her rooms without discharging what they owed. Cecily had a shrewd suspicion of the real reason underlying the landlady's leniency. She would have had her view confirmed had

she overheard Mrs. Morriston explain to a neighbour that 'them Cardews are so respectable, they give quite an air of gentility to the house.' Certain it is that she never hesitated to make use of their so-called 'gentility' as a bait for obtaining other lodgers.

Cardew was at one with his wife concerning the usual result from touching pitch; and he accepted the fact that for the present they were unable to leave Ophelia Road as but one more manifestation of their persistent ill-fortune.

Cecily worked more diligently than ever, far harder than her strength would for long endure. Every shilling she was able to put aside—and with Cardew again unable to do anything, and tortured with an ever-growing fear, how few they were!—served to lighten the burden on her mind.

They had struggled through the winter; how she scarcely knew. The spring was again coming. Fred had taken a situation

as a junior clerk and office-boy in a city solicitor's office; and Sylvia, except for the kindness of her schoolmistress, who took a deep interest in her promising pupil, would also have had to leave school before obtaining the coveted scholarship.

For several weeks Cardew had apparently been closely at work; Cecily, so terribly and ceaselessly busy, saw him writing whenever she had occasion to enter the study, now almost denuded of its books; but once, when she ventured to inquire what he was doing, he had repulsed her with, 'You shall see by and by; I must not be interrupted. If my thoughts are disturbed, I shall be useless. No, go away now, and I will tell you all in good time.'

She was terribly frightened a few days afterwards.

She entered the study, hearing, as she thought, a groan, and found Cardew with his head upon the table unconscious. It was

alarming enough, but scarcely serious. She would not allow herself to consider it anything save a fainting fit, although he seemed very strange and vacant throughout the evening. Mrs. Morriston, however (whom she had summoned in her alarm and extremity), held a different opinion; though, with a restraint rare amongst women of her class, it was not to Cecily, but to one of the other lodgers, she expressed her conviction that 'Mr. Cardew had been took with a stroke.'

Next day, and indeed for several following, John Cardew was very unwell, and Cecily became so far alarmed as to urge him to see a doctor. But upon that point he was obdurate. He would be better in a day or two, he exclaimed; it was quite unnecessary for a doctor to see him.

He could easily have told the doctor what was the matter with him, he knew, and he made up his mind that none should know.

Cecily pressed the matter as far as possible,

and then, finding that he grew terribly excited at the idea, ceased to urge it further.

Really, after all, there seemed no need, for at the end of the week Cardew was again in his study feverishly at work, and Cecily was once more able to resume her sewing without the constant interruption caused by the querulousness of an invalid.

Lately she had been almost compelled to take Sylvia into her confidence, to break through her resolution to keep the clouds off her children's faces as long as possible. She felt so terribly lonely at times with Cardew shut up in his study, and only coming from it when worked out, and consequently both unfit and disinclined for talk. A knowledge of their real position, of the fact that ruin was again staring them in the face, came as a terrible shock to the girl. She had much of her mother's force of character, and the idea which at once presented itself to her mind was that she must earn something;

and it was only Cecily's most strenuous opposition which prevented her from leaving school.

'I see that is what daddie meant,' she said, 'when he spoke to me a long while back, last summer.'

At night she lay awake thinking if there was anything to be done at odd times that would prove more profitable than helping her mother with the plainer parts of her work. Now she had late classes, she frequently met the other girls in the house, coming down the stairs dressed to go out, when she came home of an evening. They had lace petticoats, she noticed, almost as good as those her mother made, patent-leather shoes, and new and showy, if cheap, hats almost *ad libitum*. Such things were now likely to arouse vague questionings in her mind. Moreover, of late the girl Rosy Vere had several times nodded to her, and then spoken.

At first Sylvia had taken no notice. She

was certainly not a lady, even though she dressed so well; but when one day Rosy had laughed up at the girl who was following her down the stairs, saying, 'Too good for us, eh? The stuck-up minx! and the whole lot as poor as paupers,' Sylvia determined not to again lay herself open to such a remark.

It was about a week after Cardew had so far recovered from the effects of his illness as to be able to work again, and whilst Cecily was busily engaged at her interminable stitching, that Sylvia, entering, said, after kissing her—

'Mother, what is it Rosy Vere does?' Cecily caught her breath; and as she did not reply, the girl went on: 'I didn't want to go a bit, but she half pulled me into her room, saying she wanted to show me something. Mother, where can she get the things from? I never saw such beautiful clothes, except what you make, petticoats with three flounces of lace and insertions, and all the

rest to match. And then when she saw how much I admired them, she said any girl as pretty as I was—mind, I'm telling you exactly what she said, mother, not that I believe it—could get plenty of things, and keep you and daddie into the bargain, if I did as she does. What is it she does, mother? When I asked her she wouldn't tell me. She only laughed, and pushed me out of the room, saying you called me, and that she would perhaps tell me some day if I liked. But something in her face whilst she was showing me her lovely things frightened me. I felt as if I were just going to look down into a horrible pit.'

Cecily Cardew's face was very white as she drew Sylvia gently down on to her knees beside her.

'Sylvia, dear little Sylvia,' she said at last, with an infinite tenderness, 'there are things in the world which mother cannot tell you—things which God knows are too terrible

for human telling—things, Sylvia, which mother thanks God every day she knows so little of, and prays to Him that you, darling, may know even less of. You love me, you believe I know best? You must always trust me—won't you, Sylvia, till you 're old enough to judge and act for yourself? You must not ask me to explain why, but I would sooner see you lying dead at my feet than that you should ever do what Rosy Vere does. Promise me that you will never speak to her or any of the other girls in this house again. Promise me solemnly, Sylvia.'

The girl had a passionate love for her mother and father; and although she scarcely understood the former's solemnity and distress, she promised without hesitation. And Sylvia's word was never broken, her mother knew.

The episode quite unnerved Cecily. Her one desire more than ever now was to get away from the horrible contamination which

seemed to hem her in, and to surround her darling with such terrible possibilities. Oh, the horror that they could not go until they were free from debt!

That night when the children had gone to bed, and Cardew was still at work in his study, she reviewed the position.

There were still a few pounds remaining in the bank of the sum realised for her by Sefton Bell by the sale of her jewellery. And she had her mother's ring, and a few other small articles to sell; oh, it was terribly hard, terribly hard! God was drawing so far off; and yet if she believed, she might, perhaps, again touch His garment, feel His presence. And whilst she thought, there crept into her weary, fainting soul the feeling of the presence she craved, and the God of her mother again seemed to make her sore-tried heart His dwelling-place.

Cecily Cardew never lacked decision, and she had soon made up her mind. Leave the

morally tainted atmosphere of 26 Ophelia Road they must. To-morrow she would write to Sefton Bell to ask him to dispose of the few heirlooms of any value she still possessed. Then Mrs. Morriston should be paid to the uttermost farthing, and at the end of the month they would go.

At night she told Cardew what had occurred. He took it much more quietly than she had anticipated; and though he agreed that they must remain no longer than absolutely necessary at Ophelia Road, he seemed anxious to make no change until his new book was completed.

This mysterious work, in which she sometimes sadly felt that she had no share.

The next few days were spent by her in anxiety lest, after all, the few poor ornaments which she had looked out to give to Sefton Bell with scarcely controlled tears, and a terrible sadness such as one experiences when parting from dear friends, should fail to realise the

required money. As a fact they did not, but she never knew, for Sefton Bell was an excellent deceiver.

When she gave Mrs. Morriston notice, the landlady expressed her surprise and regret, for she was genuinely sorry to lose the Cardews, and liked Cecily with a sincere liking, the reason for which she herself would have found a difficulty in describing. She ventured to hope in conventional phrases that they were suited with other apartments, and even suggested that they might have had some money left them.

'No,' Cecily replied, 'we have no other apartments yet. There is plenty of time, you see, Mrs. Morriston; we shall not be leaving for a month.'

'Well, I've always liked you, mum, and all the family so far as that goes,' exclaimed the other, with a genuine ring of regret in her tone, which touched Cecily to the heart. 'I am sure I've tried to give satisfaction.'

Cecily had instinctively avoided giving the real reason for their so suddenly leaving; now she felt almost compelled to do so.

Mrs. Morriston made no comment while she was speaking, but when she had finished she said simply—

'No more'n than I've expected, mum; I was only telling them girls they must be quieter the other night. If I was a lady like you, I wouldn't stay myself. No, I wouldn't run no risks with a girl like yours, bless her heart.

'You're quite right, mum. Thanks be! my girls was married before I left the country and took to lodgings after we was turned from the farm when the new Squire came into the property. And yet I can't have the heart to turn the girls out, poor things. And them paying reg'lar too.'

'No,' said Cecily, with her thoughts far off, 'I suppose not.'

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN it was once settled they were to leave Ophelia Road, Cecily's mind was so far relieved that she suddenly became aware John was very much altered—that what Sefton Bell had suggested must be true.

For the previous few weeks she had scarcely had time to take particular notice of little actions which now began to bear witness to overstrain, if to nothing more serious. There was, for one thing, a growing irritability in Cardew. The slightest interruption, the least thing 'gone wrong,' seemed to distress him unspeakably. Never a bad-tempered man, he still controlled everything except the expression of his eyes and face, though often evidently with an effort.

All day long he worked in his little study, disturbed by the noises of the street, until in sheer desperation he placed cotton-wool in his ears. Such work, too! The novel he was writing was to retrieve their fallen fortunes, but at what a cost!

For days before he had commenced it he sat racked by terrible indecision. What would Cecily say? It was such a terrible story. Sometimes, indeed, he found himself thinking that no one but a madman would have imagined it, and having done so, dared to write it.

Then his brain seemed dominated by the idea. Surely anything was better than the terrible blankness of the page which had confronted him day after day for so long, and caused him such agony at the impotence of his imagination. And so, with the furtiveness of those whose mind is diseased, he first assured himself that Cecily was, as usual, busily engaged with her work, and then,

firmly shutting the door, he commenced to write.

He almost laughed at the ease with which the long withheld words now came; and he only paused when, seized with a fear lest he should not, after all, have secured the door, he felt compelled to get up from the table to reassure himself.

But Cecily was both incurious and busy, so there was no real cause for his fear. When she asked him what he was writing, he replied, 'A book,' and that she should know all about it by and by; all in good time.

Now there was not so very much more to write. He would be able to finish it before they moved. And then, perhaps, when it came out, and the money was plentiful once again, Cecily would forgive him his *succès de scandale*, his (as the critics would probably call it) 'brutal frankness.'

One thing he could not do. He would

never again suffer those agonising hours spent alone with the terrible blank sheet of white paper in front of him, with lines so interminable upon it, when the words would not come nor the sentences shape themselves.

Cecily had been complaining that her eyesight was not so good as it once was. Those innumerable fine tucks, eight of them measuring but an inch in width, and stitches almost imperceptible to the ordinary eye, which Miss Jemmans extolled so highly, were ruinous to her eyes. But this fact troubled Cardew nothing at all. He was so full of his book, for one thing; besides, he had once more become frightened of his face in the glass. It looked so terrible. He used to leave his writing and creep into the little bedroom to assure himself that he was mistaken. Then he could not satisfy himself, and questioned Cecily, trembling with alarm when he had done so.

No! it was not an unmixed evil that

Cecily's eyes were not so keen-sighted as formerly.

Just a fortnight before the date on which they were to leave Ophelia Road, Cardew had completed and put the finishing touches to his book. Nothing now remained to be done except to forward it to the publishers he had already interviewed with reference to it.

The firm was a new one, which had gained some amount of reputation by the issue of *fin-de-siècle*, and for most people somewhat unpleasantly suggestive, novels, by 'new writers.' The banning of several of these books by the better sort of libraries had only served to attract public attention to the volumes, and people bought where they most probably would otherwise have borrowed. Fabulous sums were spoken of as having been made by both the authors and the publishers; and a paragraph making such a statement, which caught Cardew's eye, had set him thinking of the book he ultimately

wrote. It was to be anonymous ; there was not the least objection to that, the publishers agreed ; perhaps even it was an advantage. And so, whilst he still felt the degradation, he tried to deceive his own soul.

As he was writing the last words a vague presentiment assailed him that he was suddenly become old, and was failing. He seemed all at once to have no longer any interest in life. After the strain of the last two months his brain appeared atrophied. No doubt it would recover after a time. Castelmeyer and Co. would take fully a fortnight to consider the terms, and then there would be plenty of time to decide about any further writing.

He would go into his study just the same. He should not interrupt Cecily's work there ; and besides, he felt uncomfortable when alone with her for any length of time. One never knew what her clear grey eyes might not see, nor what inconvenient questions she

might not ask. The MS. had been despatched whilst she was out on one of her weekly visits to Great Portland Street. She was as yet even unaware that the book was finished.

And so he went into his little room precisely as before, and Cecily thought that he was hard at work, when in reality he sat hour after hour turning over fantastic thoughts, only stirred into actual consciousness when aroused by some unusual noise in the street below his window.

At length it became a labour even to think. The apathy to his surroundings increased. He scarcely at times remembered his own existence, or that of Cecily and the children. Then this inertness would be succeeded by brief intervals of feverish, torturing activity, followed in turn by moments of confused ecstasy, when he felt all he had to do to conquer the world was to set his thoughts upon paper. But he never did so. The feeling was so transient, that these won-

derful ideas and imaginings were gone ere he could precipitate them upon the page, which only stared back from in front of him with a devilish blankness.

Once or twice he had suffered from slight returns of the giddiness and confusion which had caused Cecily such alarm some few months before, but as they passed off he took little notice of the matter. He was so terribly afraid of her suspecting anything.

Then he was feverishly anxious that Castelmeyer's should settle about the book. Such delay was abominable. He could have no peace till they did. Once he had the money for it, he would wash his hands of the whole thing, and would try and forget it altogether.

They would go and live in the country, away from the squalor and the noises, which sometimes almost caused him to desire to put an end to it all.

Perhaps he would be able to work in the quiet and peace of the country. Do work

as he used to. Write books which Cecily might read; set down his thoughts without fear lest she might come in and, glancing over his shoulder, read them.

Who could tell?

. . . . .

It was Saturday afternoon, and Cecily had tried to persuade him to go for a walk with the children whilst she went as usual to Great Portland Street. During dinner she had become suddenly aware how haggard and worn he was looking. No doubt it was working so hard, coupled with his desire to get away from their present surroundings as soon as possible.

'No,' Cardew replied; 'it was quite out of the question. He could not spare the time.' So Sylvia and Fred went out by themselves, and he into his study after Cecily had also gone.

Midway through the afternoon Mrs. Morriston thought that she heard a strange noise

in Cardew's room. But, with her sleeves rolled up preparing for Sunday's dinner, she was too busy to go and see. Perhaps he was packing up; they were going to leave in less than a fortnight—not that they had so very much to take with them after all; and with these reflections the incident passed from her mind.

It was quite dusk when Cecily came in. She had been delayed, for Miss Jemmans had kept her to see the new models of *lingerie* she had brought back from Paris, and which she wished her to copy. The tea had been laid by the hardworked little general, whose face was never clean, and whose very smile was outlined with dust and blacklead; but the lamp had not been lit, and no strip of light on the shabby carpet marked the shrinkage of the study door.

When she had taken off her things, and placed the precious parcel of work upon the bookcase in the corner, she lighted the china

lamp, and crossed the room to her husband's room-door.

She knocked with an elation of spirits caused by her walk and temporary freedom from the depressing influence of the dingy house.

There was no answer.

Again she knocked, and again there was no answering 'Come in.'

'Probably he has, after all, gone out,' she thought—to the post, perhaps; and then she turned the handle and pushed open the door.

For a moment it would not go back. Then it suddenly cleared the obstruction. She glanced down.

Cardew lay upon the floor, partly on his side, with his face perfectly white and still, staring up at her in the dusk.

With a cry she knelt down, and, raising his head, covered his face with her kisses. But she could not deceive herself for long.

She tried to lift him from the floor, but her woman's strength was unequal to the task. Leaving him for an instant, she crossed the room, the light from which fell in a slanting patch across the dark, inert body in the study doorway, and rang the bell violently again and again. Then she returned, and, resting the poor white face on her knee, took one of his hands in hers. It was very cold, and sent a shudder through her; but she held it fast until the door of the sitting-room opened and Mrs. Morriston entered.

Then she broke down.

'Cheer up, my poor dear. It 's only a faint,' said the landlady, without conviction in her voice. 'Loosen his collar. There! you help me, and we 'll get him on the sofey, and Maria shall run for the doctor.'

With a great effort the two women succeeded in lifting Cardew and placing him on the sofa.

Whilst waiting for the doctor they rubbed

his hands, and chafed his temples with some eau-de-cologne, which a lodger thoughtfully brought them. But from the first Cecily knew that he was dead.

At last the doctor arrived, and, pushing his way through the small knot of horrified though fascinated women and girls, who had congregated round the door on learning of the tragedy, came to the side of the sofa.

A single glance sufficed him.

'You are Mrs.——?' he said, addressing Cecily, and pausing.

'Cardew.'

'Mrs. Cardew. How long is it since—since it occurred?'

'I was out; he—my husband was at work in his study,' indicating the dark doorway of the little room.

'I heard a noise about four or thereabouts,' exclaimed Mrs. Morriston, as Cecily, bursting into tears, covered her face in her hands. 'But I didn't pay much attention, I was——'

'Yes, yes,' said the doctor somewhat brusquely. 'And you have only just discovered it. He has been dead about three hours. No one could have done anything; it was paralysis of the brain. A stroke,' he explained, seeing that Mrs. Morriston did not understand.

'Just what I feared,' said the latter; 'he used to work terrible hard.'

Cecily sat stunned by her sudden bereavement.

'John was dead. John had died alone. He had never said good-bye to her,' she kept repeating to herself.

By the time the doctor and one of the men lodgers, who had just come in from work, had carried Cardew's body into the other room and laid it on the bed, she had somewhat recovered herself.

'You have no friends you could send for?' the doctor asked.

'No, none. I have my two children;

they will be back presently,' and then, at the thought of them, she again broke down.

'If I can be of any use,' he continued, genuinely touched at the woman's loneliness, 'I shall be very glad. Let me know. But I wish you had a man to carry out the necessary arrangements. You are sure there is no one?'

'There is a friend of ours, a journalist,' Cecily replied after a pause, during which she had been evidently collecting her scattered thoughts. 'I will write to him. He will come to me, I am sure.'

'I will come in and see you to-morrow evening,' said the doctor, shaking hands, 'and perhaps he, your friend, might manage to meet me.'

'I will write and ask him to come.' When he had gone, Cecily asked Mrs. Morriston to leave her. She wanted to be alone, to realise everything, to form the words in which she would break the news to Sylvia and Fred.

'If he had lived,' the doctor had said, in the hope of giving one tiny grain of comfort, 'he would probably have become insane.'

She should not tell the children that. Till they came, she would go and be with him, and there, perhaps, in the solemn stillness of that death chamber, she might find courage for her task.

CHAPTER IX

Sefton Bell received Cecily Cardew's brief letter at the Literary Club. She had sent it there, knowing that if he were in town he always lunched at the Club.

He was terribly shocked, although not entirely surprised. It was merely that he had not expected the end so soon.

'My husband died suddenly about four o'clock this afternoon,' Cecily wrote, and a terrible dread lest these few words veiled 'suicide' crept into his heart.

He was lunching at one of the small double tables in one of the windows overlooking the Embankment with a fellow-journalist, who, noticing his sudden pallor, exclaimed—

'What's the matter, old man? Not bad news, I hope.'

'Yes,' replied Sefton Bell; 'poor Cardew's dead. A terribly sudden affair; leaves a widow and two children.'

'Been rather down on his luck lately, hasn't he?' queried the other. 'I haven't seen him here for an age.'

'Yes. Gone down and down.'

'Cardew gone!' said the man at the corner of the next table. Then adding, 'Poor devil! I meant to have looked him up. Only thought about it the other day. He went out awfully suddenly. Haven't seen anything of his for a year. If there's anything wanted, Bell, I'll do what I can.' And he made a note on the back of an envelope for an obituary paragraph.

Sefton Bell reached Ophelia Road an hour before the time appointed to meet Dr. Watson. He found Cecily more composed than he had anticipated.

She excused herself with a wan smile of welcome. 'There is so much to do. Our time is so short. Besides, it keeps me from thinking and thinking. And when I think of it all, I break down utterly, and then there are the children. I must be brave for their sake.'

Sefton had a long talk with Cecily concerning her plans. She had enough money to pay for the funeral and leave a little for emergencies after the expenses of moving. She was going to finally engage their new rooms directly everything was over. No, she said, he could not help her with Cardew's papers; she would see to those herself.

The funeral was an extremely simple one. In a better-class neighbourhood it would scarcely have attracted any notice at all. But for Ophelia Road it was asserted to be a 'grand affair.' Never before in the memory of any of its present inhabitants had two private carriages, in addition to the mourning

coach, followed the hearse. Mrs. Morriston's claim for the gentility of her lodgers was finally and firmly established. The Road was veritably *en fête*. Scarcely a window was unoccupied, and, with the inherent morbidness of the very poor, every detail was discussed and debated.

However, underlying all this curiosity was a genuine feeling of sympathy and kindliness which prompted the numerous bunches of the commoner sorts of seasonable flowers laid on the plain oak coffin, or sent in on the previous day.

The only persons following besides Fred and the doctor were Sefton Bell, Brant Hollings, and a literary friend of days gone by.

Sefton Bell returned to the house, and then left, promising to come the next evening if possible, to see if he could be of any service in arranging Cardew's affairs.

Next morning Cecily nerved herself for

the ordeal before her, and entered the little study, now instinct with such sorrowful memories.

As she had suspected, Cardew's papers were in great confusion. Sylvia had wished to help her, but she had refused; she would be alone, where no human eye could see her grief, nor human ear hear her sobs. It were better so, she told herself. She would go through with it alone.

There were several unfinished MSS. in the table-drawers. But a glance showed her that had they been completed, their incoherent nature would have precluded their being of value. These she destroyed. They could never have been anything save a terrible reminder of the writer's decline. Two or three more MSS. were finished; she placed them on one side. It was whilst sorting these that she came across some loose pages of MS., evidently from their numbering belonging to a work of con-

siderable length, pages thrown aside in the desire for nicety of penmanship or composition.

She glanced at them quite casually at first, and then her eyes caught some words which riveted her attention, and finally brought a look of horrified amazement into her face.

She leaned back in her chair, and read on. At the end of the last page she buried her face in her hands.

Suddenly the explanation of the dead man's secrecy concerning his last work broke in upon her.

He had been unwilling that she should know the terrible book he was writing.

It was all so horrible, this trampling upon all the beliefs she held dear, this tearing aside the veil, and exhibiting to the curious public eye the sanctities of woman's nature, this laying bare of a woman's soul with, as it were, a scalpel.

After a short time, during which she sat with terror in her heart and shame dyeing her cheeks, which were so colourless but a little while ago, she commenced a feverish search for other portions of the book amongst the remaining unsorted papers.

The few sheets of the MS. she came across she laid aside with the others to be put in a place of safety.

It was quite late in the day ere her task was completed. Except for a few stray memoranda of small sums still owing for contributions from various papers and magazines—several of which she, from past experience, recognised would probably never be paid—there was no money to be received.

This fact, however, scarcely affected her at all; her mind was too fully engrossed with the terrible discovery she had made, this last effort of a diseased mind.

After all, she thought, there would be little difficulty in finding out if the MS. had been

despatched to any publisher. Cardew had always made a methodical practice of entering such things in his diary.

She turned to the page comprising the last week of his life; there was an entry in the space just a week before.

'Sent MS. of ——— to Castelmeyer and Co. To hear from them within a fortnight.'

'Castelmeyer and Co.! What did she know of them?'

Then she got up from her seat and searched hurriedly amongst a pile of old literary and daily papers which littered the farther corner of the study.

At last she found what she wanted, an advertisement of the firm, and in the same issue of the paper a review of a book published by them, headed 'One man may,' etc., which concluded in the words which she had vaguely remembered as having somewhere read. 'This volume, which is one of an equally—shall we say "suggestive"?—

series, affords food for reflection quite outside the feeling of disgust with which we have put it down. One is tempted, remembering the vigorous prosecution of a well-known publisher now deceased for venturing to issue translations of Zola and other modern French authors, to wonder whether the erstwhile Public Prosecutor is sleeping, or peradventure is on a journey. It is, at all events, time that his attention should be called to at least the most flagrant examples of this series of *fin-de-siècle* fiction. As an example of "new woman's" apparent liking for the unsavoury topics of life it is certainly no less remarkable.' Cecily's woman's wit at once decided that the novel which the diary noted as having been sent to Castelmeyer and Co. was the completed MS. of which she had only been able to discover detached pages.

There was but one thing to be done. The book must be recalled.

She was unwilling to even let Sefton Bell

know that her husband had written such a book. No, she must do the work of recovery alone. For one thing, being a man, and without that subtle essence of innate purity which dominates a good woman, he might even attempt to persuade her to forgo her determination. He would certainly not see the tenor of the book in the light she did. And remembering the phenomenal success books in this series had met with, he might even urge her for the sake of the children to do nothing in the matter; even to accept the money which would probably result from such a course, every coin of which would call a burning flush of shame to her cheeks. At all events, he, being a man, would not understand her attitude in this matter. She would risk nothing by telling him.

That night, when she lay down in the darkness and awful loneliness, she became consumed by a terrible anxiety lest she

should be too late; lest the publishers should decline to see her, or refuse to give up the MS. She could not sleep; and when she turned over instinctively for companionship and comfort, she burst out into terrible sobs, for there was none for her any more.

At last she crept out of bed; and in her agony of loneliness and dread lest she should fail in what she had to do, she knelt and prayed, her face buried in her hands to shut out the darkness—

'Oh God, why didst Thou take him from me? Why didst Thou? Thou knewest I wanted him more than Thou didst, who hast myriads of souls at Thy beck and call. Oh God, pity my loneliness! He would never have written such things' (and she shuddered in the darkness) 'if he had not been mad. It was Thou, Thou, God, who gavest him those gifts, and tookest them from him. Whose is the blame? Oh God, dear God, let me be in time, let me be in time to save his name from

defilement! There are the children, God. If Thou wilt not hear me, think of them.' And then she became calmer, and fearful lest in her distress she should have addressed God too familiarly; and so she crept back into bed, shivering with cold and excitement.

Next morning Cecily set out directly after breakfast to call on the publishers.

She had little difficulty in finding their business premises, situated in one of the new streets in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross.

Messrs. Castelmeyer and Co. were successful publishers of successful authors. All the new writers with grievances against either their Maker, man, or Society came to them. 'Advanced women' novels with a dominant note of sex, and 'studies' by decadent men, were their specialities. Their premises were as aggressively modern as their publications were advanced.

Cecily pushed back the swing door, glazed with stained-glass art panels, and asked of

the clerk who came forward if she could see the head of the firm on a matter of urgent necessity.

After a few minutes of waiting she was shown into the senior partner's room, an almost luxuriously furnished apartment of considerable size.

He was a short, stoutly built man with sandy hair, and rather a loud manner.

'Mrs. Cardew, I presume,' he said, getting up and placing a chair for Cecily near the corner of the table at which he had evidently been writing.

'Yes,' replied Cecily in a low tone. 'I have come about a MS. of my husband's. You have heard—have heard?'

'Yes,' said the man in a sympathetic tone. 'I am extremely sorry. In fact, I have only just written yesterday afternoon. Here is the letter; I kept it back to submit it to my partner to propose terms, which I think would have proved eminently satisfactory

to the author, and now hope you will be prepared to accept them, so that the book may be placed in the printer's hands at once.'

'I can accept no terms for my husband's book,' Cecily replied in a low voice, which trembled. 'I wish to take the MS. away, to withdraw it.'

'Withdraw it? God bless my soul! Excuse me, Mrs. Cardew, but do you know what you are refusing? I have made an offer' (taking up a letter from off the table and referring to the inner page) 'of £200 for the book, with a further royalty equal to £50 for every thousand copies after 5000. We have every reason to anticipate that the sales, of what I am willing to admit is a very remarkable book, will far exceed that number. *The Shrine of Venus* and *A Little Knowledge*, to name only two of our successful books, are in their 21,000 and 16,000 respectively, and neither is so good as Mr. Cardew's.'

'Money is of no consequence to me in such a matter as this,' replied Cecily firmly. 'I shall be grateful if you will spare me any further discussion'—and her voice trembled —'and give me the MS.'

'I will give you £300 down. I will write you the cheque now,' exclaimed the publisher, mistaking her emotion for signs of relenting.

'No,' said Cecily. 'Nothing you can offer me, Mr. Castelmeyer, will purchase the book.'

'It is needless to ask if there be any other publisher in the case,' continued Mr. Castelmeyer, 'after that.'

'No, there is none. The book will simply not appear.'

'Are you quite justified?' asked the publisher, at the same time pressing the knob of an electric bell. 'It is a work of art, perhaps a little *caviare* to the general public, but still a powerful book, of which I

make no doubt a large number will be called for. But——'

'I entreat you,' said Cecily, interrupting him, 'not to prolong this interview.'

'Very well, madam.' To a clerk who had just entered, 'Bring Mr. Cardew's MS. It is done up to go to Hesselmont and Jones'.'

Five minutes later Cecily was walking rapidly away, as if fearing pursuit, in the direction of Trafalgar Square, with the brown-paper parcel under her arm, and tears in her eyes, which even her thick widow's veil could not entirely hide.

. . . . . .

In the evening she wrote a note to Mr. Castelmeyer asking him to respect her desire that Cardew's last book might be a 'dead book'; that he would tell no one of it, nor of her action. 'The money you tempted me with,' she wrote, 'meant more to us than you could have guessed. But I do not wish to pose as a martyr, modern

martyrs being chiefly those whose martyrdom is that of their own obstinacy or indiscretion. I simply wished to preserve my husband's memory clean and unsullied.'

The publisher read the letter, exclaimed, 'A —— good woman, a remarkable woman!' and then dismissed the subject from his busy mind.

When the house was still, about midnight, she lit the fire, and sat down beside it to burn the MS. contained in the parcel, which she had not had the heart as yet to untie.

As the pile of closely written sheets lay on her knees, her tears fell fast upon them. It was hard that she should have to destroy as unclean the last thing he had written.

Then as the flames leapt up with a hungry crackling, she set about her task.

With the relentlessness of a woman doing right, she laid the pages, a few at a time, upon the fire, and watched them curl and brown,

and then burst into sudden flames. And when the grate became choked with ashes, she thrust them down remorselessly into the still glowing heart of the fire.

At last the final pages were placed in the grate. She held her breath to watch them catch fire; and then when at length they blazed up and lit the room with a sudden fitful glare, she rose from her seat, and went with a glad smile upon her face softly into the chamber of her great loneliness.

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